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REVIEWS

Pioneer Dolby Atmos AVR
Monitor Audio 5.1 speaker system
Sony Master Series OLED TV
Now TV streamer
LG B8 OLED TV

8K 85in MONSTER

Bigger, brighter, sharper – Samsung Q900R TV pushes picture quality to a new level!

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Everything you need to know about 8K TV

DREAM THEATRES

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Yamaha CX-A5200 processor blows us away

FILM & TV

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From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869 840

Distributed in the UK by Marketforce UK Ltd

BACKGROUND WALL IMAGES:

©SHUTTERSTOCK.COM
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Home Cinema Choice, ISSN 1359-6276, is published monthly with an additional issue in May by AVTech Media Ltd, a division of MYTIMEDIA Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, UK. The US annual subscription price is £68GBP (equivalent to approximately \$98USD). Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431 US Postmaster: Send address changes to Home Cinema Choice, Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at CDS GLOBAL Ltd, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9EF. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: November 29, 2018



CEDIA Awards, p24

Welcome

The winner of the Best Home Cinema Global accolade in this year's CEDIA Awards (see p24) features a 169in screen, 33 seats and... a Full HD projector. In an AV world dominated by 4K (and with 8K now garnering attention – see p20), this is quite surprising.



Credit is due, therefore, to the CEDIA judges looking beyond the spec sheet and celebrating a project that excels in areas other than simple image resolution. **This is a room that clearly hits the owner's brief**, meets industry standards around sound calibration, features a gorgeous, unique styling, and comes in at a tempting price.

Of course, a 4K projector can be swapped in at a later date. The room, now complete, is easily upgradable. As our AV-Holic explains this issue (see p86), getting the basics of a home cinema space right, rather than installing the desired hardware and hoping for the best, is a smart idea...

Mark Craven
Editor



MENU



CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer:
The experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Jon Thompson:
Film producer and post-production expert delves into Hollywood and AV



Steve May:
HCC's former Ed, is one of the UK's most respected AV journo's



Martin Pipe:
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the industry



Richard Stevenson:
Former Editor of the UK CE trade journal ERT



Ed Selley:
Audiophile Ed mixes his home cinema passion with a love of vinyl



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Professional video calibrator writes about technology and tweaking

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BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** KEF R Series speakers revamped for 2018 **AMAZON** Fire TV Stick gains 4K and Atmos **BLUESOUND** 'Gen 2i' for hi-res multiroom range **SKY** Netflix deal done **AT THE PLEX** This month's cinema releases **NEWS X10** Hot news stories in bite-sized chunks **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE – FALLOUT** Spy thrills and spills hit Ultra HD Blu-ray & **MORE!**

Wonder woofer?

PSB SubSeries → www.psbspeakers.com



'Powerful, precise and truly exciting to experience' – that's the verdict of PSB founder Paul Barton on the brand's new SubSeries 350 subwoofer. Available for £1,000, it combines a sealed gloss-black cabinet with 12in front-firing driver and 300W amplifier, with 'smart bass' limiting circuitry to prevent overdriving. A 10in, 200W model (the SubSeries 250) sells for £700; both can hook up wirelessly to your AVR through PSB's optional RT100 kit.

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R u ready for more?

KEF R Series → www.kef.com

KEF's R Series of speakers has been fully revamped and the new range – comprising three floorstanders, plus standmount, centre channel and Atmos options – is available from November. The company claims 1,043 individual changes have been implemented, with revisions to the UniQ and bass driver design, trim rings, ports, grilles and cabinet construction. The flagship R11 floorstander is priced at £4,000 per pair, with R7, R5 (pictured) and R3 (standmount) models at £2,600, £2,000 and £1,300 per pair respectively. Expect to pay £850 for the R2c centre and £800 for a pair of R8a Dolby Atmos modules.



4K TV art class



Available in 43in, 55in and 65in versions, Samsung's new The Frame TV will appeal to those

aiming for the ultimate stealth AV setup. When not in use for 4K HDR duties, the TV can display artwork (chosen from an updated library of 'hundreds' of pieces) and uses a new UI to find pictures that match a room's decor. Four standard magnetic bezel options (plus a fifth John Lewis exclusive) provide a level of customisation. Prices start at £1,200. www.samsung.com/uk

Dynaudio gets active again



Dynaudio has replaced its Xeo 2 wireless active bookshelf speaker with a new model, the £1,400-per-pair Xeo 10. Once again a two-way design, the speaker gives both its newly developed 5.5in midbass driver and soft dome tweeter a dedicated 65W amplifier. A revised DSP-based crossover results in a claimed boost to dispersion, off-axis performance and 'across-the-board enhancements to clarity and detail resolution.' Rear-mounted physical inputs and a remote control complete the package. www.dynaudio.co.uk

Amazon boosts Fire, Echo

Dolby Vision graces £50 streamer, while smart device family gains a sub

Amazon has given its Fire TV platform a refresh with a new streaming Stick that brings 4K playback to the slim-line product for the first time, plus Dolby Atmos, Dolby Vision and HDR10+ support. It has also expanded its Echo range of AI gizmos to include a subwoofer, plus an Input model that brings Alexa functionality to any 'dumb' speaker.

The new Fire TV Stick 4K is available to pre-order and due to ship on November 14 with a price tag of £50. This makes it a more affordable option than the bulkier, 4K/HDR-capable £70 Fire TV player, while introducing new functionality – the Stick is the first streaming device available with both Dolby Vision and Atmos support.

'We've listened to our customers and pushed to deliver the complete 4K solution they are looking for, all within a compact form factor,' claims Eric Saarnio, Head of Amazon Devices, Europe.

Key to the new streamer's range of talents is a quad-core 1.7GHz processor which Amazon rates



as 80 per cent more powerful than the one employed by the previous Fire TV Stick, and revised Wi-Fi antenna technology. The result is the 'most powerful 4K stick' on the market, promising improved loading times and slicker UI navigation.

Add HDR10+ to Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos compatibility, and this budget streamer appears to have all next-gen content bases covered. As usual, you can expect Amazon's Prime Video service to be heavily promoted within the UI, but Netflix, BBC iPlayer, ITV Player and others remain VOD options.

The Stick will be bundled with an upgrade on Amazon's Alexa Voice Remote, which now provides control (via physical power, volume and mute buttons) over compatible TVs, AV receivers and soundbars. Amazon is also making it available as a standalone purchase for those seeking to replace the remote on their existing Fire TV device – pricing is £30.

Echo expands

Also fresh from Amazon is a range of new Echo components, of which the Echo Sub and Echo Input may pique the interest of AV shoppers.

The Input (£35) is best thought of as an Echo Dot without the built-in low-power speaker. A slender, circular dongle available in black or white, it provides Bluetooth or 3.5mm connection to a third-party speaker, and a four-way internal mic for detecting voice commands.

The Echo Sub, meanwhile, sells for £120 and is designed to partner Echo audio devices in 1.1 or 2.1 configurations. It uses a down-firing 6in woofer, driven by a 100W amp, within a sealed cabinet. A fabric wrap matches the styling of new Echo and Echo Dot speakers.

The Echo Sub brings bass to the smart home party



Playlist...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

Bad Boys I & II (Ultra HD BD)

While the 4K image upgrades are excellent, it's the exclusive Dolby Atmos remixes that make these outrageous action films must-owns for home cinema-hedz.



Young Sheldon: Season One (All-region BD)



A satisfying double-disc BD debut for the surprisingly enjoyable *Big Bang Theory* spin-off.

Mary and the Witch's Flower (Region B BD)



A beautiful Blu-ray outing for a delightful anime that manages to recapture some of that elusive Studio Ghibli magic.

Monkey Shines (Region B BD)



Fans of George A. Romero and killer monkeys will welcome the hi-def release of this twisted 1988 thriller.

Harlequin (Region B BD)



Robert Powell stars in this oddball 1980 flick that reworks the story of Rasputin with bonkers results.

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

Widows



November 06: A transatlantic bigscreen update of the hit 1983 ITV drama by Lynda La Plante, director Steve McQueen's tense thriller sees four widows taking on a dangerous heist that their husbands died trying to pull off.

Overlord

November 07: American soldiers trapped behind enemy lines on the eve of D-Day must fight against the horrific results of a secret Nazi experiment in this gory action-horror from producer J.J. Abrams.

Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald



November 16: Albus Dumbledore seeks the aid of Newt Scamander in stopping the dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald in this second in the series of Harry Potter spin-offs. Here's hoping it can recapture the magic of its excellent predecessor.

Pioneer doubles up on 4K

Heavyweight universal deck promises 'unmatched' performance

Following the announcement of its debut 4K Blu-ray player, the £1,000 UDP-LX500 [see *HCC* #291], Pioneer has now revealed details and pricing of its bigger brother. The UDP-LX800 lands with a retail tag of £2,200, and claims to provide 'a new state-of-the-art benchmark for 4K UHD Blu-ray and SACD playback.'

The deck shares some of the same features of its more affordable stablemate, including Dolby Vision HDR playback; the ability to display the MaxFALL and MaxCLL metadata values of HDR content; audio and video signal separation over twin HDMI outputs; preset image modes for use with different display types; and PQLS jitter-reduction transmission with compatible Pioneer AV receivers.

Additional features are predominantly based around its audio performance. The UDP-LX800, says Pioneer, riffs on the analogue audio section design of its flagship (also £2,200) PD-70AE SACD/CD player.

'Both left and right signal paths on the PCB are designed with an identical layout, not to mention placement of parts. Much attention has been paid to maintaining an accurate channel balance, an effort that has resulted in excellent separation,' claims the brand.

The UDP-LX800 also employs the same 32-bit, ESS Sabre DAC featured in the PD-70AE, the ES9026 PRO.

Another appeal to audiophiles is the player's stereo balanced XLR output, and a beefed-up construction. While



the UDP-LX500 weighs in at 10.3kg, the UDP-LX800 tips the scales at 13.8kg, partly due to a 3mm steel plate (added to the 1.6mm steel-sheet chassis) to improve rigidity.

'The UDP-LX800 employs parts and materials that have been painstakingly selected after repeated testing, prototyping and viewing/listening trials in order to determine their defining characteristics,' enthuses Pioneer.

'We're confident we have created a player offering remarkable levels of electrical and signal purity, all the way from the power supply to the circuit paths taken by video and audio signals. By paying careful attention to every detail, the UDP-LX800 delivers an unmatched level of playback quality.'

The new Pioneer decks will fill the void left by the departure of Oppo from the high-end Blu-ray market, particularly its UDP-205, but face competition from

Panasonic's DP-UB9000. Yet other brands that had a strong presence in the 1080p BD arena apparently remain unswayed by its 4K successor. There's still no sign of a spinner from Pioneer's sister brand Onkyo, or from AV marques Yamaha, Denon and Marantz.



Identical L/R audio board layouts strive for perfect channel balance

Bluesound evolves with Gen 2i

Multiroom range gains power and driver tweaks, plus smarter connectivity

Bluesound has fettled its range of hi-res, wireless multiroom hardware. New 'Gen 2i' versions of its Node, PowerNode, Vault and Pulse products are in retailers now, introducing features to boost performance and usability.

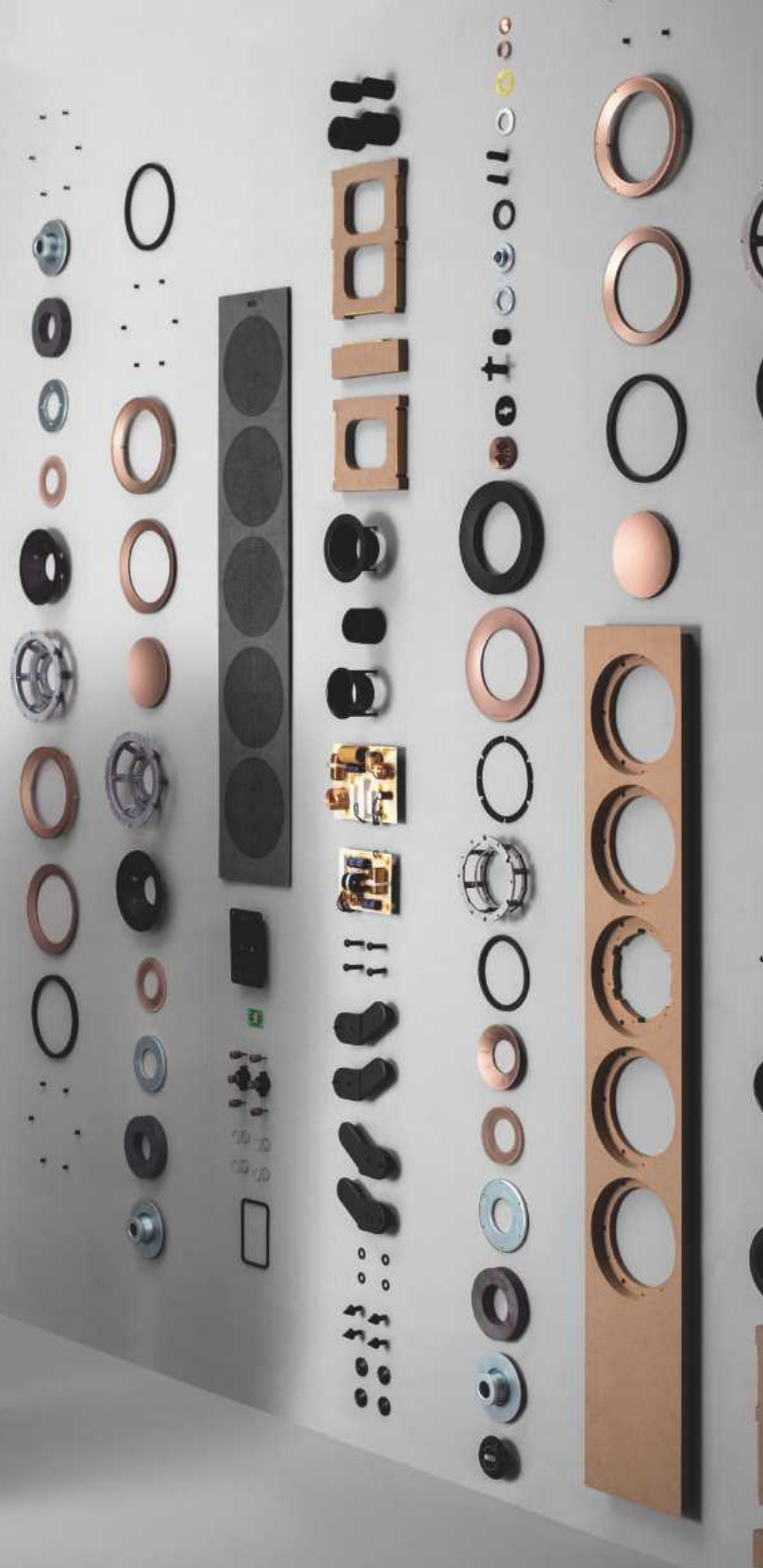
On the wireless side, two-way Bluetooth means Gen 2i players can operate as a source, streaming to Bluetooth headphones/speakers. Support for the aptX HD codec has also been added, enabling 24-bit streams. Meanwhile, Apple AirPlay 2 functionality will arrive via software update, delivering Siri voice control to those with iOS devices, and Wi-Fi has been upgraded to dual-band.

The Pulse 2i and Pulse Mini 2i speakers claim double the onboard power over the previous generation, plus revised drivers and new DSP settings. The Pulse Flex 2i also gets a driver overhaul, while the Pulse Soundbar 2i now offers HDMI connectivity with ARC/eARC.

Price points are unchanged, apart from the now-£750 Pulse 2i. www.bluesound.com

Dual-band Wi-Fi and send/receive Bluetooth now feature across the Bluesound product range





The new R Series. The only thing to remain the same is the name.

At KEF the quest for sonic perfection demands constant innovation. So when we sought to improve R Series we completely re-engineered it and changed everything. Discover the full story on our R Series website and find your local KEF dealer for a breathtaking demonstration.

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Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

Harryhausen: The Movie Posters



Titan's superb new 192-page art book finds occasional HCC writer Richard Holliss acting

as your guide to the sensational pieces of artwork created to promote Ray Harryhausen's sci-fi/fantasy films around the globe. Supporting the stunning poster reproductions is a wealth of fascinating info about the movies and their release histories. Priced just £30, it's an indispensable book for fans of Harryhausen and classic poster art.

Smeg FAB28RDM3 'Mickey' fridge



Smeg has teamed up with Disney to produce a new limited edition version

of its iconic FAB28 fridge, featuring a bespoke sketch of Mickey Mouse reaching for the handle. Only 90 of them have been made (one for each year since Mickey's 1928 debut) – and it'll cost you £1,700 to get your hands on one.

Chinese Movie Magazines



Fans of Eastern cinema will get a kick out of this new hardback art book (£35, Thames &

Hudson) that charts the evolution of the local film industry through more than 500 full-colour covers from Chinese movie mags between 1921 and 1951. Critic Paul Fonoroff puts it all into context with detailed annotations and timelines.

Sky's the limit for Netflix

Is long-awaited teamup a match made in binge-watching heaven?

Sky is integrating Netflix into its Sky Q platform, and the partnership goes way deeper than anyone first anticipated. Rather than simply offer the SVOD service as an app (as we've already seen from Virgin Media), Netflix has been folded into the main Sky Q user interface itself. Pre-registration began in October, and the integration is rolling out now.

Subscribers to Sky's new 'Ultimate On Demand' package (more of which later) will see Netflix shows sited alongside Sky content on their main Q Home page, and incorporated into other Q screen furniture.

HCC enjoyed an early look at the way Sky and Netflix have bundled services, and it feels like a transformative change. The arrival of Netflix also coincides with subtle tweaks to the user interface. The thumbnail grid will be replaced by rails, designed to make navigation easier (and more akin to Netflix, actually).

So what's the user experience like? Most obviously, the Sky Q Top Picks area will now feature Netflix content interspersed with Sky shows, enabling you to select and play a Netflix programme directly from the Sky UI. In our hands-on preview, historical drama *The Crown* had pride of place.

Netflix programming also features in the Continue Viewing rail, depending on which Netflix profile was used last. A new Ultimate On Demand area within Sky Q features both services. Some rails are all Sky, some all Netflix, some are a blend.

There's also voice interaction – bark 'Netflix' into your Sky Q touchpad remote and the app fires up – and Netflix content has also been integrated into Sky's text search. Enter '*Stranger Things*' and the search function locates the show, which can be launched directly.

Of course, there's also a dedicated Netflix app, which can be selected and run just like any other app on the platform.

Counting the cost

From a billing perspective, Sky's Ultimate On Demand subscription combines its Sky Box Sets charge (currently £5, and featuring US and UK series from Sky, Fox and Discovery channels) with Netflix. As the Netflix tier is the £7.99 Standard HD package available elsewhere, and the combined price is £10, this gives a monthly saving of £2.99 compared to if the two services are bought separately. Customers will also need to have an existing Sky Q Entertainment subscription (currently £20 a month).

If you already have a Netflix account you can sign up for the Ultimate On Demand package using your



The Ultimate On Demand pack blends Netflix and Sky content in the Top Picks menu

Netflix details, and Sky then orchestrates a hand-over behind the scenes. This switches your billing to Sky. Once you've signed in and linked your Netflix account, you can continue to log into the Netflix app on any other device you may have.

If you currently subscribe to the Sky Q Experience package (a £12 fee), which includes UHD delivery, then you automatically get the UHD streams from Netflix at no extra cost. In all, the Netflix Sky Q Experience gives users two streams on Sky Go, streaming to Q Mini set-top boxes, UHD replay on the Sky Q 2TB PVR, Netflix Premium with four streams and UHD. There is no UHD premium just for Netflix.

Those that don't take the Ultimate On Demand package, and are existing Netflix customers, can still sign in via the Netflix app on their Sky Q box, with no change to their regular Netflix habits.

Wot, no HDR?

The Sky Q/Netflix marriage sounds convenient, but does come with caveats. Firstly, Sky Q does not currently support any HDR (although it is coming, probably in 2019), so no Netflix shows can be seen in HDR via Sky's hardware.

More thorny is the subject of Dolby Atmos. Netflix currently has a number of programmes available to view with Dolby Atmos audio via select hardware, using a Dolby Digital+ bitstream. Sky itself offers Dolby Atmos on some programming (including sports) and a growing number of UHD movies, again delivered using Dolby Digital+.

However, when we searched for Dolby Atmos Netflix content on the Sky Q platform, programmes were only available in standard 5.1. When we quizzed Sky representatives about this, there was a certain amount of confusion.

Technically, we can't see why Netflix on Sky does not offer Dolby Atmos audio. So while it may not be there on day one, we would hope to see a firmware update that would enable it.

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 B&O plans a Lynching

Cult filmmaker David Lynch has been drafted in to give some of Bang & Olufsen's speakers a makeover. The special edition collection finds Beoplay A9, M5 and P2 and Beosound Shape models decorated with imagery from Lynch's 'War Between the Shapes' and 'Paris Suite' artworks. Visit www.bang-olufsen.com/davidlynch for more information on the limited edition range.

2 Argos enjoys jumbo sales

Argos says that its sales of what it calls 'jumbo TVs' have soared over the past year. Not only did sales of screens measuring 65in or more increase during the World Cup by over 400 per cent month-on-month compared with the same time last year, the largest selling size bracket overall is now 51in-59in (up from 44in-50in in 2017).

3 Onkyo's eARC update

Onkyo is bringing eARC (Enhanced Audio Return Channel) technology to selected AV components via a firmware update. The rollout began with the integration of eARC on the Onkyo TX-RZ830 and Integra DRX5.2 AV receivers, and enables the sending of object-based audio from a TV to the receiver via HDMI.

4 Netflix gets interactive

Streaming king Netflix has revealed the next season of Charlie Brooker's award-winning sci-fi anthology series *Black Mirror* (arriving in December) will include an interactive episode that allows viewers to 'choose their own storyline.' The company has also confirmed that other 'choose your own adventure' TV specials and movies are in the works.

5 Rakuten's 4K heroes

VOD platform Rakuten TV bolsters its 4K HDR lineup in November with *Skyscraper*, *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*, *Hotel Artemis*, *Hotel Transylvania 3* and *Teen Titans Go! To The Movies*. Fellow box office hits *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, *Incredibles 2* and *Mission: Impossible – Fallout* also join the platform this month, albeit not in 4K.

6 The sight of sound

The National Theatre is using Epson 'smart caption glasses' to assist theatre-goers with hearing difficulties. The Moverio BT-350 spex display a synchronised transcript of dialogue and sound from a production directly onto the lenses. The glasses are available now for the productions of *Hadestown* and *War Horse*, and 'will be implemented into all new season performances' going forward.

7 In AWE of IMAX?

CI distributor AWE Europe hosted the first UK demonstrations of IMAX Enhanced hardware and software at its annual expo in October, using the Marantz AV8805 processor. See p122 for our verdict on the new format...

8 CD sales plummet

The switch to music streaming continues to have a big impact on the CD market. Figures released by the Recording Industry Association of America show a drop in CD sales from 35m in the first half of 2017 to just 18.6m in the first half of 2018. Meanwhile, CD sales revenue dropped from \$420m to just \$245m over the same period.

9 FindAnyFilm adds Virgin

Virgin Media Store is the latest digital platform to join up with FindAnyFilm.com. An Industry Trust initiative, the FindAnyFilm website addresses concerns around film and TV copyright infringement by providing legal routes for UK consumers to access entertainment content.

10 Water nice surprise!

Arrow Video is ending the year with a limited edition Blu-ray outing for Kevin Costner's soggy blockbuster *Waterworld*. Arriving on December 10, Arrow's release boasts three different cuts of the film: the original theatrical cut, the 40-minute longer US TV cut and the European 'Ulysses' cut. A new feature-length *Making of...* is among the set's bonus goodies.



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Streaming Wars



Disney has revealed details (and a first image) for the live-action *Star Wars* TV series being produced for its upcoming streaming service. Set between the fall of the Empire and the rise of the First Order, *The Mandalorian* follows a 'lone gunfighter in the outer reaches of the galaxy far from the authority of the New Republic.' Jon Favreau (*Iron Man*, *The Jungle Book*) is producing and writing the show.

Netflix heads to Narnia

Netflix has snagged the rights to produce films and series based on C.S Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* novels. This presumably puts an end to Sony Pictures' long-rumoured cinematic adaptation of *The Silver Chair*.

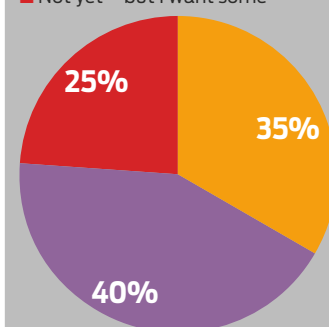
Battle Angel delayed

Fox has pushed back the release of its upcoming James Cameron-produced, Robert Rodriguez-directed anime adaptation *Alita: Battle Angel* from December 21 to February 5. Boo!

We asked...

Do you have any in-ceiling or in-wall speakers in your home cinema system?

☐ Yes
 ☐ No
 ☐ Not yet – but I want some



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Cruise's bruises

Mission: Impossible – Fallout – Paramount Home Media Distribution – DVD/Blu-ray/Ultra HD Blu-ray



Get ready for more pulse-pounding action, more mind-boggling intrigue and more death-defying stunts when the sixth *Mission: Impossible* movie explodes onto disc in the UK on December 3. The 4K and Full HD platters come loaded with Dolby Atmos audio (the former also gets a Dolby Vision HDR upgrade), a trio of audio commentaries, and an isolated score. A bonus disc takes you even further behind the scenes with featurettes, storyboards and a deleted scenes montage.



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Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

Perfect movies to watch on Halloween



Halloween obviously.
Paul Alsup

John Carpenter's *Halloween* or *The Thing*.
Jason Cheal

Amityville Horror, *The Conjuring*, *Poltergeist*.
Mark Hinton

Friday the 13th.
Lee Regan

A new one every year.
Scott Kaufman

What you're watching on your home cinema...



John Hughes weekend.
Sixteen Candles, *The Breakfast Club* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

Robert Corrigan

I'm introducing my 10-year-old son to the MCU movies. Next on the list is *Guardians of the Galaxy*.
Kristoffer Østergaard Rasmussen

The plan is to watch *A Perfect Murder*, *The Game* and *The Negotiator*.

Sean D Dobson

Deadpool 2: Super Dooper Edition 4K Blu-ray.
Dan Mann

Star Wars Rebels Season Four on Blu-ray.
Richard Farrer

I fancy watching *Goodfellas* tonight.
Paul Lay



Just seen *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, and it was great fun and a nostalgic ride.

Patrick Peeters

Shrek 2 and *True Romance*.
Walter White



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Back of the 'net

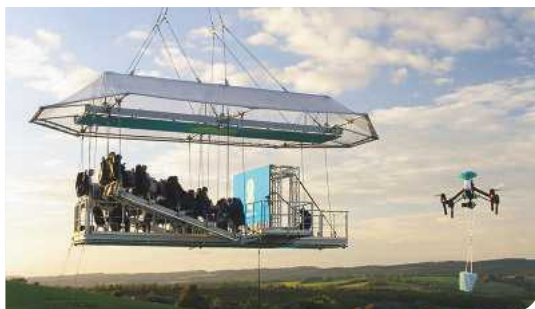
Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



Mortal combat

Philip Reeves' fantasy novel *Mortal Engines* (where London has become a travelling city...) comes to the bigscreen December 14 via a script penned by LOTR team Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens. Check out the trailer to get a flavour of its steampunk aesthetic and obligatory eye-popping CGI.

youtu.be/-it10qPQf-Q



Up, up and away

To promote a new tie-in with BAFTA, telecoms provider EE has created the 'world's first cinema experience in the sky', with students of Goodwood Flying School hoisted 100ft in the air to watch a movie, with popcorn delivered by drones. Presumably the chosen film wasn't *Airport*.

youtu.be/OVHSElKxLMO



Dirty old Harry

In *The Mule*, Clint Eastwood's first starring role since 2012's *Trouble with the Curve*, the veteran actor plays a 90-year-old horticulturist-turned-cocaine smuggler – remarkably, it's based on a true story. Bradley Cooper, Laurence Fishburne and Michael Pena co-star. In cinemas January.

youtu.be/2rINpJy808o



Private listening

Focal is known for its premium headphones but the open-back designs of its Elear, Utopia and Clear models aren't ideal for domestic harmony. Step forward its new £800 Elegia cans, which wrap their bespoke drivers in close-back over-ear cups, meaning only you can hear what you're listening to... www.focal.com/uk/headphones



TOP PICK

Let's tell that story again

The *X-Men* franchise is back in *Dark Phoenix Saga* territory, with director Simon Kinberg aiming for a more faithful adaptation of the story than was delivered in *X-Men: The Last Stand*. Confused? You can watch all seven previous movies before *X-Men: Dark Phoenix's* Summer 2019 debut. youtu.be/QWbMckU3AOQ



Untangling wires

Cable corp QED has refreshed its website to include a new 'cable finder' function, which aims to make browsing for new wires simpler via a step-by-step process. Minimum lengths can be specified, and the displayed results range up and down the price scale. QED then shows you your local stockists. www.qed.co.uk



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8K TV

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It's another resolution upgrade, but one unlike any other in the history of home video.

Steve May has been counting the pixels... all 33,000,000 of them



LG may have demo'd an 8K OLED, but Samsung has already got its 8K QLED sets into UK shops...

FOR SEASONED TECH-WATCHERS, the arrival of 8K displays won't have come as much of a surprise – such screens have been doing the rounds at AV shows for years. But for consumer flatscreen shoppers, 8K is yet another development to unpick, hot on the heels of 4K and HDR, and it brings with it many questions...

So, I see you can now buy an 8K TV. What's that all about?

8K is the end game in what has been a decade of change for broadcast and home video standards. We like to think of it as 4K on steroids.

More specifically, it's the second of the two spatial resolutions that were mandated for the UHD specification back in 2012 by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The first, 8-megapixel 4K, is officially known as UHD-1, while 33-megapixel 8K is UHD-2.

Here's the nub: 8K delivers four times the resolution of 4K, that's to say 3,840 x 2,160 pixels. We sometimes refer to a 4K image as 2160p (its vertical resolution), not least because it sounds more techy. 8K has a resolution of 7,680 x 4,320 pixels, which is four times as dense again. Ergo, we can describe 8K as 4320p.

So what does this extra image density give us? Well, for one thing the possibility of even more miniscule detail. Items can be resolved onscreen with gobsmacking sharpness. An 8K panel's pixel grid structure is impossible to see (but then so is 4K unless you're really close). 8K images have photographic print quality.

This is just marketing nonsense. 4K hasn't even taken off yet...

Actually, that's not really true. According to the latest industry data from analytics outfit Futuresource, nearly half of all TVs shipped worldwide will, by the time you polish off your Christmas pud, be 4K. And the number of screens shipped will be three times larger by 2022. 4K is now very much a mainstream proposition. Even your relatives will want one. And as 4K becomes ubiquitous, prices drop, meaning TV makers need a new premium product to kickstart their revenues again. It's the circle of life.

So who is making 8K TVs?

Sharp was actually first to ship, launching the LV-70X500E 80in monitor across Europe earlier this year, but Samsung is now ahead of the game when it comes to getting 8K into actual living rooms in the shape of its Q900R series of TVs.

There's also no shortage of TV makers stockpiling pixels in the wings. 8K is expected to do particularly well in China, so expect brands such as Hisense, Skyworth and Changhong to soon have their own UHD-2 screens mass-produced for prime time. Elsewhere, LG Display has been developing 8K OLED and debuted it in prototype form at IFA 2018 in September. When it cracks the production process for that, multiple floodgates will doubtless open as TV brands around the world source the panels for their own bespoke developments.

And then there are the 8K oddities, such as JVC's 8K e-shifting DLA-NX9 projector. This uses clever



optical technology, shifting pixels diagonally and applying Multiple Pixel Control, to create a convincing – but not native – 8K image.

Are we likely to see any native 8K projectors?

Not anytime soon. Pixel-shifting enhancements and other image manipulation techniques are far more cost effective ways of delivering a 4320p picture, given there's so little (okay, zero) native content available.

There must be genuine 8K material coming soon, though?

If you're living in Japan this December, you're in luck, as Japanese state broadcaster NHK, which has been beaver away on 8K since the mid-1990s, is planning the first 8K TV channel. Just don't expect to see much in the way of entertainment on it; we'll wager the schedule will largely consist of artfully shot test footage.

The rest of us will have to cast our net wider for 8K. Chip maker Ambarella has developed the H3, an 8K SoC (System on a Chip) for use with virtual reality and drone cameras. That might lead to something.

And PC users could be amongst the first to experience proper 8K visuals, as AMD and Nvidia make progress developing new high-power GPUs. The first real PC applications for 8K are likely to come from image workstations and engineering suites, however, rather than a souped-up version of *Fortnite*.

Are broadcasters going to get behind 8K like they have 4K?

It's unlikely. The workflow required has yet to be commercialised at an affordable price. Around the world, only NHK has concrete plans to shoot and distribute shows in 8K (a format it dubs Super Hi-Vision).

Programme makers are interested in 8K, but not necessarily because they want to give us even sharper pictures. For instance, when 8K cameras are used for acquisition during live sports, directors can zoom into an image to give highly detailed replays. Even when cropped, the picture looks extremely sharp. It's a bit like the sequence in *Blade Runner* where Deckard zooms into a picture using the Esper photo analysis machine.

Surely 8K Blu-ray can't be far off?

Actually, there's precious little chance of 8K content making it onto physical media either, at least for the time being. While 4K has been relatively successful on Blu-ray, even its biggest devotees will concede it's a niche market. And an 8K variant would be even more specialist – and hardly something studio bean-counters will be eager to greenlight.

Okay, so what about 8K Netflix or Amazon Prime Video?

Internet-delivered content is probably our best bet for 8K, at least in the short term because the infrastructure that Netflix and its ilk use enables them to constantly upgrade both playback apps and their own back-end. Still, we suspect the sheer >

Visitors to this year's IFA show witnessed an 8K explosion, with flatscreens from LG (top left), Sharp (top right) and Samsung (bottom left), plus JVC's DLA-NX9 projector

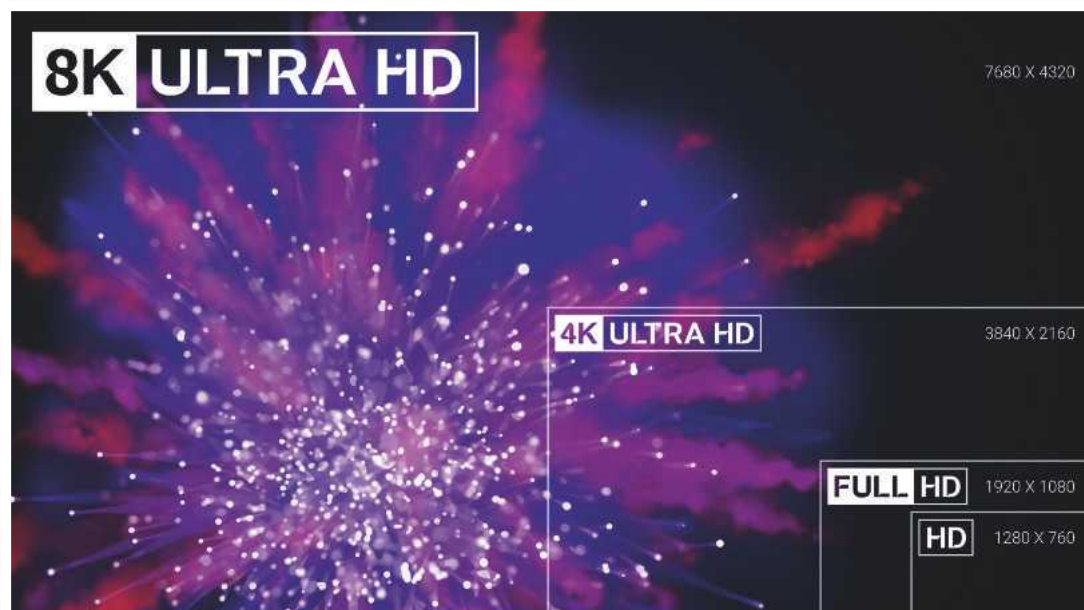
Resolution revolution

A history of pixel pushing

The introduction of 8K displays comes only a few years after the first 4K TVs reached the market. This is a rapid development compared to some earlier changes, but not all of them...

For instance, John Logie Baird's prototype TV broadcasts in the late 1920s used an electromechanical system offering a 30-line resolution. This was never deemed viable by the BBC, and had quickly been replaced by 1936 with two competing electronic formats – an improved 240-line/25Hz system developed by Baird, and a 405-line/50Hz iteration from Marconi-EMI. The Beeb soon adopted the latter after finding workflows more efficient.

There then followed a period of glacial change, with 405-line imagery staying until the launch of the 625-line BBC2 in 1967. This format, with its 576 lines of usable resolution, later became known as standard-definition and eventually formed the basis of VHS, Laserdisc and DVD (albeit with variations). It wasn't until the mid-2000s (in the UK at least) that 1080-line high-definition became a consumer reality, since followed by 4K and now 8K.



difficulty in producing material able to exploit the native power of 8K will be insurmountable for years to come.

Are movies being shot in 8K yet?

Filmmakers have begun to use 8K-capable cameras (although not necessarily taking advantage of full resolution), because it gives them the highest possible original material to work with. Raw content can then be downsampled for editing. One TV show shot this way is Netflix's *Lost in Space* reboot.

Sony's F65 CineAlta camera was the first to use a Super 35mm equivalent 8K CMOS sensor in 2011, used to lens movies at beyond 4K resolution. More recently, rival RED has produced four 8K cameras, each offering incremental improvements. *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* was shot on the RED Weapon.

But 8K is putting fresh demands on equipment makers. Currently, the resolution is so good that it actually shows up problems with the lenses themselves. IHS Markit analyst Paul Gray suggests most cinematic lenses available just aren't up to scratch. 'The resolution of 8K merely reveals the

Marketeers are keen to stress that 8K has 'four times the pixels of 4K' – this diagram shows exactly what they mean

flaws in the glass, the lack of edge resolution,' he told *HCC*.

I remember reading that *The Wizard of Oz* had been scanned at 8K resolution...

Indeed – and almost ten years ago as prep for the film's 70th Anniversary Blu-ray release. Why did the Warner Home Video restoration team bother? Because 8K is a useful archiving format for feature films, providing studios with a superior master from which to then strike 4K and HD versions.

Other movies that have had 8K scans (with appropriate restoration) include David Lean's 1962 epic *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and gorgeous 1992 documentary flick *Baraka*. The key point here is that movies shot on film (*Wizard of Oz* was scanned from the original 1939 negatives) continue to release more detail as scanning technologies improve.



RED's Monstro and Helium CMOS sensors offer 8K (actually 8,192 x 4,320 resolution) digital capture

Does 8K mean I'll need to get new HDMI cables?

For native content, yes, as shoehorning 8K into a 4320p panel is no easy task. 8K screens need HDMI 2.1, a bigger bandwidth pipe than the existing HDMI 2.0 specification, to bring in the engorged UHD format from external sources such as a TV set-top box. Prior to this, first-generation 8K monitors, such as the aforementioned Sharp, have used a ganged four HDMI input to achieve the same result.

The HDMI Forum has specified a new 48Gbps-bandwidth Ultra High Speed HDMI Cable, which supports 8K video at 60fps and 4K at 120fps.

Yet it's not only HDMI which is getting an upgrade. The DisplayPort standard for PC monitors has also been improved, to a 1.4 version that handles 7,680 x 4,320 at 60fps with HDR and 32-channel audio.

So – no content now. Does this mean 8K is all about upscaling?

Exactly! Creating 8K content is expensive and delivering it challenging, but AI is an easy interim fix.

Samsung has developed Machine Learning Super Resolution (MLSR), an AI-driven image processing technique that can upscale any source to 4320p. This uses comparative algorithms to interpolate missing detail, and from what we've seen so far, the results are stunningly effective. Detail Creation adds texture to low-definition areas, while Edge Restoration improves pixel definition and edges. MLSR is smart enough to adjust brightness, black level and colour in real time too.

8K upscaling on a largescreen TV can simply make 4K (including your growing UHD Blu-ray collection) look better. That's a big win, and what the early adopter focus should be.

Okay, now I'm interested. Let's say I buy an 8K TV – what size should I get? What are the viewing distance recommendations?

There's an inescapable relationship between screen resolution, image size and viewing distance. Just as 4K warrants a larger screen than HD, plus closer viewing, 8K is a further exaggeration.

Ideally, 4K TVs should be watched between 1.5x and 2x their screen width, in order to see the resolution benefit (other elements of a 4K picture, such as HDR and wide colour space, are more easily appreciated and are not so dependent on viewing distance). A sensible viewing distance for 8K would therefore be between 1x and 1.5x the width. This is why TV manufacturers all believe that 8K will stoke demand for screen sizes larger than 65in. It's being suggested that 80in is the sweet spot – so it may be time to re-evaluate your living room furniture.

Hold on, should I just wait for 16K instead?

No, no and no again. We can absolutely guarantee that there will never, ever be a 16K display device for your home...

...and even if there is, you'll be too busy staring out your Habitation Pod window at the Martian landscape to really care ■



Top: *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* was the first commercial film to be shot on RED's 8K Weapon camera
Middle: *Lawrence of Arabia* was scanned at 8K by Sony Pictures for its 50th Anniversary release in 2012
Bottom: Netflix has joined the 8K brigade too, lensing this year's *Lost in Space* reboot in 4320p

Dream Theatres

Each year the **CEDIA Awards** showcases the astonishing work of custom installers from the UK, Europe and beyond. Here we focus on the media room and cinema room category winners – perhaps one of these projects will inspire you to upgrade your own system!





The installer fitted 33 traditional cinema seats across five rows

◀ Best Home Cinema £40,000 and under

Winner: **Sound Sense**

We're used to seeing custom cinema rooms offering seating for no more than eight or ten viewers – this project from India's Sound Sense fits in space for 33 people, enough for the owner's family and large circle of friends. Five rows of seating with non-reclining chairs were used to accommodate this demand within the 25ft x 19ft room.

Surround sound comes via a 9.2.4 speaker system using models from Phase Technology's CI stable, with a Sony VPL-HW45ES projector (a Full HD model, surprisingly) firing Blu-ray images to a 169in 2.35:1 projector screen. The dramatic lighting design is controlled via Rako hardware.

The CEDIA judging team praised not only the cinema's aesthetic appeal, but the installer's audio calibration approach, with acoustic treatment (including rear-wall diffuser panels) used to counter first reflection and reverberation time issues.

Sound Sense also picked up the Best Home Cinema Global award for this relatively low-cost project.

www.soundsense.co.in



► Best Home Cinema £40,000-£120,000

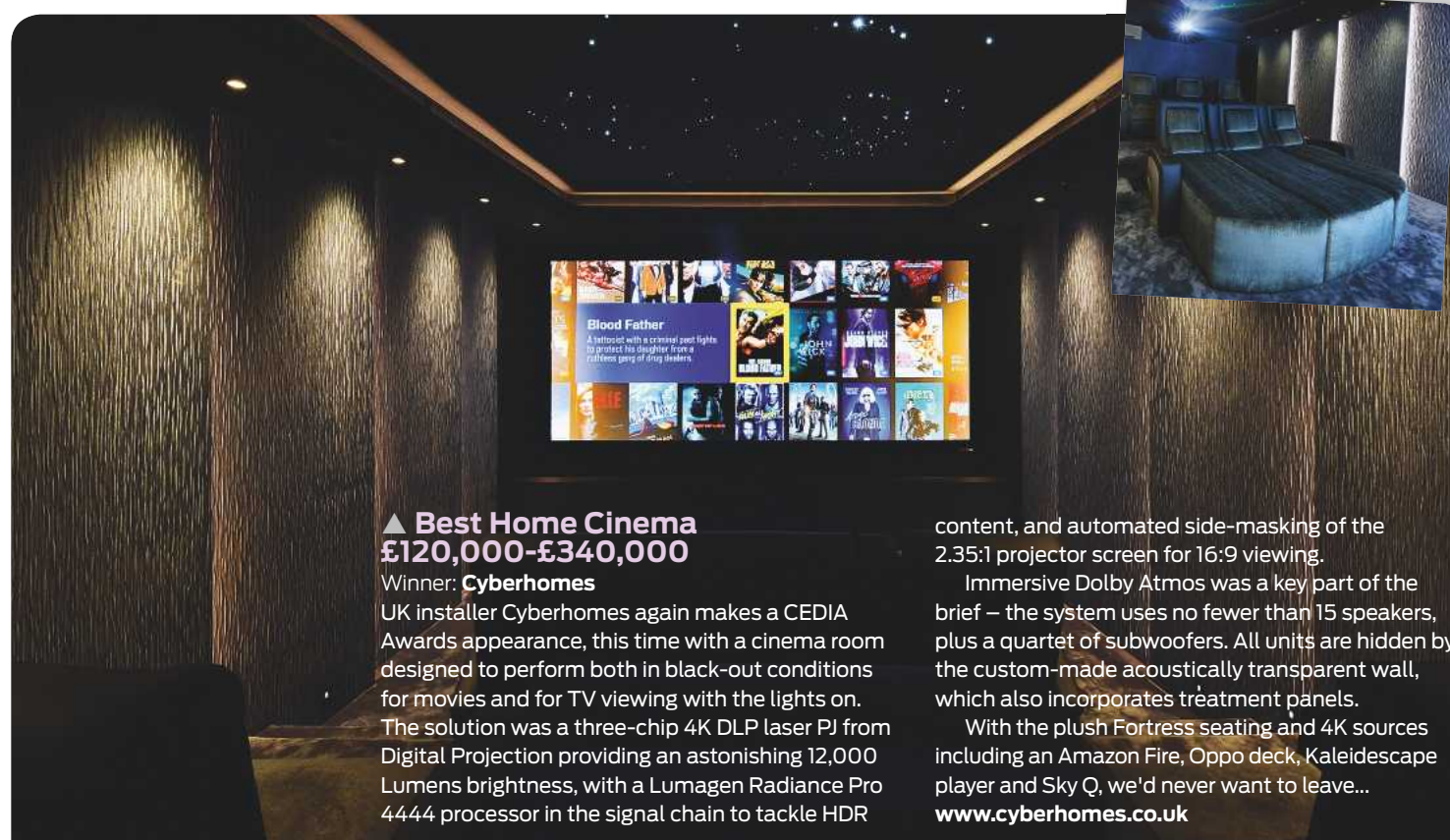
Winner: **Archimedia**

Sometimes all it takes to persuade someone to invest in a home cinema is to invite them to experience one. This winning project from Middle East company Archimedia came about after its eventual owner attended an open day at one of its showrooms (locations include Dubai, Riyadh and Cairo). They left a convert, earmarking space in a new-build home for a state-of-the-art setup.

Potent 3D projection was one of the demands, here delivered by a 3,000 Lumens Barco Orion Cinemascope projector and monster 166in projector screen. B&W in-wall speakers, plus four subwoofers, provide the Dolby Atmos/DTS:X audio in conjunction with an AudioControl Maestro M9 processor and Rotel power amplifiers.

As impressive as the spec sheet is, we're drawn to this room's smart styling. Floor, wall and ceiling lighting create an inviting, relaxed space, as does the mix of cinema recliners and a front-row sofa.

www.archimedia-me.com



▲ Best Home Cinema £120,000-£340,000

Winner: **Cyberhomes**

UK installer Cyberhomes again makes a CEDIA Awards appearance, this time with a cinema room designed to perform both in black-out conditions for movies and for TV viewing with the lights on. The solution was a three-chip 4K DLP laser PJ from Digital Projection providing an astonishing 12,000 Lumens brightness, with a Lumagen Radiance Pro 4444 processor in the signal chain to tackle HDR

content, and automated side-masking of the 2.35:1 projector screen for 16:9 viewing.

Immersive Dolby Atmos was a key part of the brief – the system uses no fewer than 15 speakers, plus a quartet of subwoofers. All units are hidden by the custom-made acoustically transparent wall, which also incorporates treatment panels.

With the plush Fortress seating and 4K sources including an Amazon Fire, Oppo deck, Kaleidescape player and Sky Q, we'd never want to leave...

www.cyberhomes.co.uk



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► Best Home Cinema £340,000 and over

Winner: **Cornflake**

Claiming the top-tier Home Cinema prize is this tech-heavy premium picture palace. Previously featured in *HCC* [see #284], and the work of London outfit Cornflake, it's noteworthy for being the first IMAX Private Theatre installation in Europe, employing a bespoke dual-laser projector system casting passive 3D and 4K images onto its floor-to-ceiling screen, delivered from a proprietary IMAX movie server. The 7.2 sound system is driven by 360W-per-channel amplification.

Technical challenges abounded, not least having to lower the floor of the basement space to create room for the desired three rows of seating, while styling was equally important. Furnishing, lighting and decorative choices all factor into the cinema's £1,000,000 (!) approx completion cost.

Still, that outlay gets the owner an award-winning setup. 'The result is a residential cinema that's quite like no other,' said the CEDIA judges. www.cornflake.co.uk

▼ Best Media Room £20,000 and under

Winner: **M.E.G.A. AV Installations**

This 4K TV media wall installation should inspire those seeking to make efficient use of limited space while maintaining a clean look.

Built into a one-bedroom apartment, it plants a Samsung display centrally within a custom-made AV unit. A high-gloss piano finish above and below means that when the screen is switched off, the cabinet has a uniform look.

The TV is mounted on a Future Automation pull-out-and-swivel bracket, with space in the unit below for the owner's CD collection and in-wall KEF Ci-range speakers. The adjoining cabinetry houses racked kit (including a Denon receiver and Sonos Connect:Amp), all easily accessed (the racks are on wheels) and air-controlled. Very tidy.

www.megaavinstallations.com



▼ Best Media Room £20,000-£75,000

Winner: **Connected Works & Total Solutions**

Another project featured in *HCC* this year [see #290] – and delivered by UK companies Connected Works and Total Solutions – the star attraction of this media room is its twin-screen implementation. When the owner wants to go bigger than the wall-mounted Sony OLED TV (pictured below), a drop-down projector screen is cleverly integrated into the wall unit, with pictures coming from an Epson EH-TW9300.

Dirac EQ from an Arcam AVR390 provides room optimisation, ensuring the 5.2.2 Dolby Atmos speaker system (using Artcoustic and Definitive Technology enclosures) sounds its best. Sources are Apple and Chromecast streamers, Sky Q and a Sony 4K Blu-ray player.

Subtle lighting built into the screen wall is the icing on a smart cake.

www.connected.works ■ www.totalsolutions.technology



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Best Media Room Global

Winner: **Audio Images**

An obvious living space rather than a dedicated theatre, but this best-of-breed US project doesn't skimp on the high-end hardware. The fixed-frame projector screen (with eye-catching bias lighting) is partnered with a Barco 4K projector, while behind it sit the LCR speakers of the room's enveloping 9.4.2 Dolby Atmos system.

Digital parametric EQ, plus physical acoustic treatments, were used to fine-tune performance – a must considering one entire wall is made up of sliding glass doors leading to an outdoor courtyard (which explains why this installation was dubbed 'Inside Out' by Californian system builder Audio Images).

Hardware, including Marantz and McIntosh processing/amplification, is squirrelled away in a boot room, leaving this room free to do what it's designed to – provide a space for music, movies, TV, games, and 'fun'.

www.audioimages.tv

Best Dressed Rack

Winner: **The Next Level**

One glance at the picture below will tell you this isn't the kit rack for a standard home cinema project. Instead, Buckinghamshire smart home specialist The Next Level grabbed the Best Dressed Rack gong for its work in a luxury apartment block, a project that includes multiple satellite boxes, AV receivers and Crestron control hardware. CEDIA's judges lauded the company's workflow process, which involved careful planning and off-site testing. We like the extra space allocated to future additions – something to take onboard when planning your own rack...

www.thenextlevel.co.uk



And the rest More winners from the 2018 CEDIA Awards

1



Best Integrated Home £120,000 and under

Winner: **TwentyTwo Integration**

Best Integrated Home £120,000-£230,000

Winner: **Intuitive Homes and Ultamation (1)**

Highly Commended: **Homeplay**

Best Integrated Home £230,000-£340,000

Winner: **SONA (2)**

Highly Commended: **Cyberhomes**

Best Integrated Home £340,000 and over

Winner: **Environ (4)**

2



Best Integrated Home – Global

Winner: **Intuitive Homes and Ultamation**

Best Showroom

Winner: **Sound Sense**

Highly Commended: **The Pyramid Group**

Best Lighting System

Winner: **Environ (3)**

Best Hardware

2N - Verso IP Intercom

Multiple Dwelling Unit Design

Winner: **The Next Level**

Technology Meets Design

Winner: **The Next Level**

3



Life Lived Best at Home

Winner: **The Next Level**

Best Documentation

Winner: **The Next Level**

Highly Commended: **Sound Sense**

Best Trade Supplier

Habitech

Best Training Course

Winner: **Whole House Integration with URC**

Total Control

Highly Commended: **Meridian SMART Education**

Best Technology Feature

Winner: **Chris Haslam - Grand Designs**

For more info, visit www.cedia.co.uk

4

PHILIPS

OLED+ 903




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OLED+

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'If you can **hold**
someone's attention
with a
single sound
you have a lot of
POWER...

Turn down the lights, bolt the door and crank up the home cinema system. **Steve May** talks to *The Haunting of Hill House* sound engineer **Trevor Gates** about the art of making scary noises...

DARK SHADOWS MAY be creepy, but it's the sound of creaking floorboards overhead, an unearthly wail (or is it wind?) from the surround channel, and the sudden crack of thunder that really tingles the spine and makes us start when watching our favourite horror.

Creating the sound design for chillers is an art that all home cinema fans will appreciate, and few audio engineers are as good at it as Trevor Gates.

An experienced sound editor, Gates has worked on a series of goosebump-raising modern horror movies including *Get Out*, *Gerald's Game* and *Don't Breathe*. Most recently, he won the Emmy Award for Outstanding Sound Editing for the cult TV show *Atlanta*, specifically the horror-inflected episode *Teddy Perkins*.

And this Halloween, Gates intends to shock your socks off as the Supervising Sound Editor on *The Haunting of Hill House*, a ten-part Netflix original series.

We reached out to Gates across the ether to find out how he records those things that go bump in the night, amongst other stuff...

When you were working on *Get Out* did you suspect that it would be a breakout hit and critical success?

I had a feeling. I kept telling Jordan (Peele, director/writer) that something was going to happen, that *Get Out* was going to be a thing. I was completely overwhelmed the first time I watched it. Turns out I was right.

Are there any sonic elements in *Get Out* you're particularly proud of? Sequences that HCC readers should listen out for?

I'm definitely proud of the way the Sunken Place sounds. That was an otherworldly composition, for sure. And I think we did a very good job of being quiet and articulate throughout the movie.

At first glance, *Atlanta* is very different from your genre movie work. It's mainly a TV comedy after all. Did you approach it differently, or is the art of sound design largely the same regardless of genre?

It was a bit different, but I felt like I knew what I wanted to do sound-wise going into it. I wanted to feel real, authentic, but specific and heightened when appropriate. With that said, *Atlanta* was very different from episode to episode. There were always new challenges, and every episode had a focus that needed to be explored a bit differently than the last.

What's really fun about this job is that we are in the business of telling stories, specifically with sound. Although sound design can be very different from genre to genre, the approach has the same fundamental semantics at its core. A lot of it has to do with timing. What do we want to hear, and when do we want to hear it? I believe this is universal, and extremely crucial to sound design.

In the horror genre we can find times to create surreal sound, like the Sunken Place in *Get Out*.



Trevor Gates won the Emmy Award for Outstanding Sound Editing for his work on TV series *Atlanta*

That was a soundscape that was completely imagined. Or in *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, we created pace through quiet scenes with a clock that was never seen, but a completely real and ordinary sound.

In *Atlanta* we used a perceived silence in the *Teddy Perkins* episode to drive the tension between Darius and Teddy. We built a gun fight in the 'cold open' of [Season Two episode] *Alligator Man*, and creatively designed gunshots, ricochets, falling pots, pans, and glass to drive the chaos and the threat of something that could potentially be so very real.

All those sounds were designed to live in a specific space and time to give you a visceral experience. And throughout the season we built background ambiances inside and outside locations to make you feel like you were right there with the characters, but without distracting you from story and dialogue. It's a fine balance of sound in time. What do you want to hear, and when do you want to hear it?

You must have been thrilled to have been Emmy nominated for your work on the *Teddy Perkins* episode. What's the story behind the sound design for that, as it clearly has a strong thriller sensibility...

I was very excited to hear of our nomination. I think I have a fantastic team of sound people that work for me, and I hold high expectations for the work that we deliver. And this is definitely one of those moments where I feel that good work didn't go unnoticed. I'm very thankful for that.

When [director] Hiro Murai and I discussed the sound for *Teddy Perkins*, we decided that we wanted this episode to hold silence; to be quiet. We wanted to hold people in a cold house, feeling the awkward tension between Darius and Teddy. We also wanted to feel the detail of everything that was happening in this perceived silence, like the globe spinning and the gross ostrich egg. The sound of footsteps in the space, music echoing through the rooms... ➤

Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House* remakes the 1959 novel by Shirley Jackson



Sound man in demand

Audio engineer Gates has been busy in Hollywood

Atlanta



Donald Glover leads this dramedy series focusing on Atlanta's rap culture. Debuted in 2015 on FX; Season Three will run in 2019.

Get Out

Thought-provoking and Oscar-winning 2016 frightener cuts an impressive figure (and sounds sublime in DTS:X) on 4K Blu-ray.

Ouija: Origin of Evil



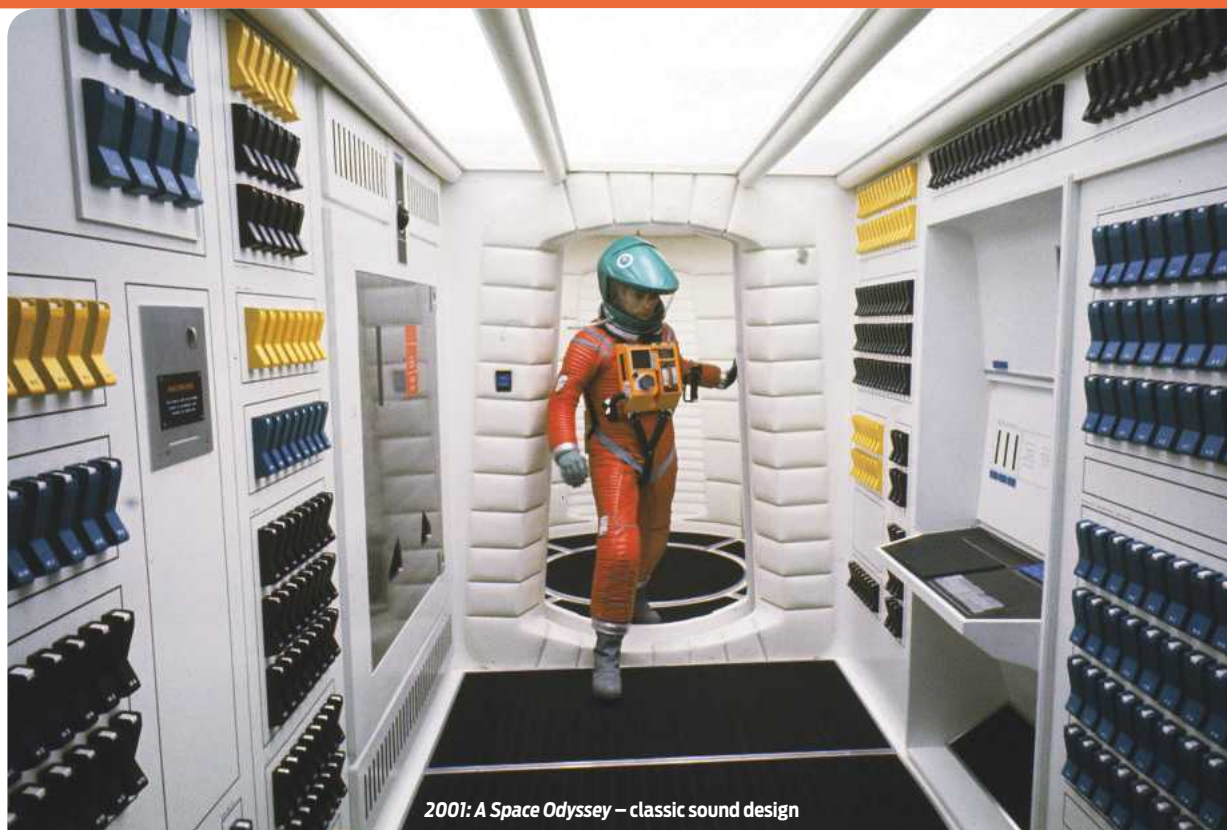
A much better movie than its predecessor, this 1960s-set spookathon (released in 2016) is well worth a spin – if you dare.

Don't Breathe

With hapless burglars targeted by a blind man, sound design proves a vital ingredient of Fede Álvarez's claustrophobic 2016 thriller.

Maggie

Arnold Schwarzenegger gets to flex his acting muscles (rather than his real ones) in this zombie-infused low-budget 2015 drama.



2001: A Space Odyssey – classic sound design

Every soundscape in this episode was carefully crafted, and because it was a 'quiet episode' we had to be very articulate; we had nothing to hide behind.

Horror, more than any other genre, relies on audio to convey atmosphere. And in many cases, it's the absence of sound which is the most frightening. How do you approach this?

I've found that the most effective approach to making an atmosphere quiet is not the absence of sound, it's the isolation of sound. You give the audience one small audible sound to lock into – even if it's barely audible, you've done your job. And to be clear, this can be very difficult. Because the sound has to be the right sound, and you only have one, so it better be good. We did this with the cold air of the house in *Teddy Perkins*. I did it with the clock in *Ouija: Origin of Evil*. I've been known to use a single cricket, or a fridge hum, or a knocking pipe. If you can hold someone's attention with a single sound, you have a lot of power in what happens next.

Weird or interesting audio is always exciting. *Eraserhead* is a great example of otherworldly sound design. What other genre classics have interesting sonics?

It's true, David Lynch has always made some bold choices in sound. And I always admire bold choices, even when they are not otherworldly. One of my favourite sound scenes from a classic is in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Right before HAL takes over, as Dr. Frank Poole is performing maintenance outside the ship, there is an even minute scene where the only things you hear are the breaths of Frank, and the hiss of an air hose. I think this is bold, and very cool.

The jump scare has become a cliché in modern genre movies – quiet, quiet, BANG! How do you feel about that?

I think this is a powerful tool that is often abused. We often find ourselves experiencing a jump scare that is forced; something that wasn't really composed to be scary, but leans on a loud sound to frighten the audience. It's a cheap trick. But that doesn't mean that all jump scares are cheap. One filmmaker that I continue to work with who does a fantastic job with the jump scare is Mike Flanagan.

One of the most memorable jump scares from a film he and I worked on together didn't even have a loud sound for the jump. On *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, we are on a quiet shot of a hallway, then cut to little possessed Doris leaning over the shoulder of one of her family members speaking in tongues/whispering. There is no loud bang, but in the theatre, the audience had a visceral response. They effectively provided the loud sting.

You worked with Mike on *The Haunting of Hill House* for Netflix...

Yes. Mike has some good tasteful jump scares in there for you! I don't want to give anything away, but I'm very proud of this work. It's a great story, with some very interesting sound. You'll definitely get your fair share of dynamics here. A lot of quiet followed by loud. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this series. We think it's fantastic.

Often it's the downright creepy atmosphere you create with audio that stays with the audience longest – *Ouija: Origin of Evil* is a great example of this...

It's all about being specific and being bold. It doesn't have to be a weird sound, but if you can make some

great choices, you'll have a very creepy atmosphere just from the minimal selections you've made. You often hear the term 'less is more', well in the creepy atmosphere world, this is absolutely the truth.

For *Ouija* we built a very creepy sound world when Doris becomes possessed: clock, footsteps, breath, and demon. Originally the possession scene had score throughout, but we did such a stellar job of making it creepy, the director decided to take out the score and play it only with sound design.

We often hear that directors, cinematographers and colourists will agree a tonal palette for a movie? Is there an equivalent consensus on audio?

I think a good sound designer can create a sonic motif for film and TV. You're always looking for something signature, something unique. And it's always a fun challenge to explore the idea of a sonic signature, whatever it may be. I'm always trying to think outside of the box, to bring something special to whatever project I'm working on, to help tell the story in a special way...

TV and movie audio has evolved rapidly from stereo to 5.1 and now immersive audio with Dolby Atmos. What do you think Atmos brings to the movie/TV experience?

I think the Dolby Atmos experience is absolutely incredible. It's such an immersive experience. We just mixed *The Haunting of Hill House* in Dolby Atmos. The clarity and depth of the mix in that format is something unique and incredible. The separation of sound, through whatever is happening at any given moment, is unparalleled.

Can you tell us a little about your own home theatre?

I have a 5.1 surround sound home theatre. I have



a Yamaha receiver with all Klipsch speakers, and a 75in 4K LCD TV. After working on *The Haunting of Hill House* in Dolby Atmos, it is on my to-do list to upgrade!

Gates on *Get Out*: 'I think we did a very good job of being quiet and articulate throughout the movie'

What examples of movie or TV audio have inspired you? Can you cite great examples of sound design? Who are your industry heroes?

Let's see... Nature sounds and Foley: *Cast Away*. Gun fights: *Heat*, *Black Hawk Down*. Sword fights: *Kingdom of Heaven*, *Gladiator*. Anything Edgar Wright (huge fan). Anything Pixar. Recently: *Arrival* and *Annihilation* – those were very cool-sounding tracks. *Sunshine*, *Alien*, *Blowout*...

I realise that list is eclectic, and I suppose the list could go on, but those are a few.

What's the scariest noise?

The one that is least expected... ■

→ THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE

→ Netflix Original

If you're of a nervous disposition, it might be an idea to give this adaptation of Shirley Jackson's classic gothic horror novel a miss. At the very least, watch it midday with your sewing circle chums for company. *The Haunting of Hill House* makes *American Horror Story* look like a sitcom.

Jackson's tale has had two previous cinematic outings, as *The Haunting* in 1963 and 1999, but here eschews the psychological in favour of full-fat terror. There's nothing unambiguous this time around. These ghosts are real and they're going to mess you up.

Written and directed by Mike Flanagan (no stranger to the genre, with *Gerald's Game* and *Ouija: Origin of Evil*), his reworking jumps back and forth in time, revealing how ghostly trauma has affected the unfortunate Crain family. And Flanagan's direction is genuinely unsettling.

In the house he pulls right back, characters small in the frame, the rooms clearly hiding evil in the shadows; then he cuts to a big close-up that'll have you shrieking.

Presented in 4K with HDR10 and 5.1 or Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos, depending on your Netflix app and display device, the 10-episode series looks superb, while the immersive soundmix is unrepentantly chilling. Every nook and cranny of the soundstage is put to good use; there are creaks aplenty, and the use of sudden dynamics to shock is brilliantly brazen.

With *The Haunting of Hill House* Netflix has given its subscribers a top-notch chiller. If it doesn't make the hairs rise on the back of your neck and your heart skip a beat, then you're probably already dead...



The Haunting of Hill House launched on Netflix on October 12

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REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE** **SAMSUNG** 85in Q900R 8K QLED **PIONEER** Affordable seven-channel Dolby Atmos AV receiver **PANASONIC** Flagship DP-UB9000 Ultra HD Blu-ray player **MONITOR AUDIO** 5.1 Monitor speaker package **YAMAHA** MusicCast 50 and 20 multiroom speakers **NOW TV** 4K-enabled media player **SYNOLOGY** Entry-level NAS & MORE

Surround sound with brains

Yamaha's 11-channel CX-A5200 processor claims to use AI skills to fettle its home cinema sound. We put it to the test on p42...

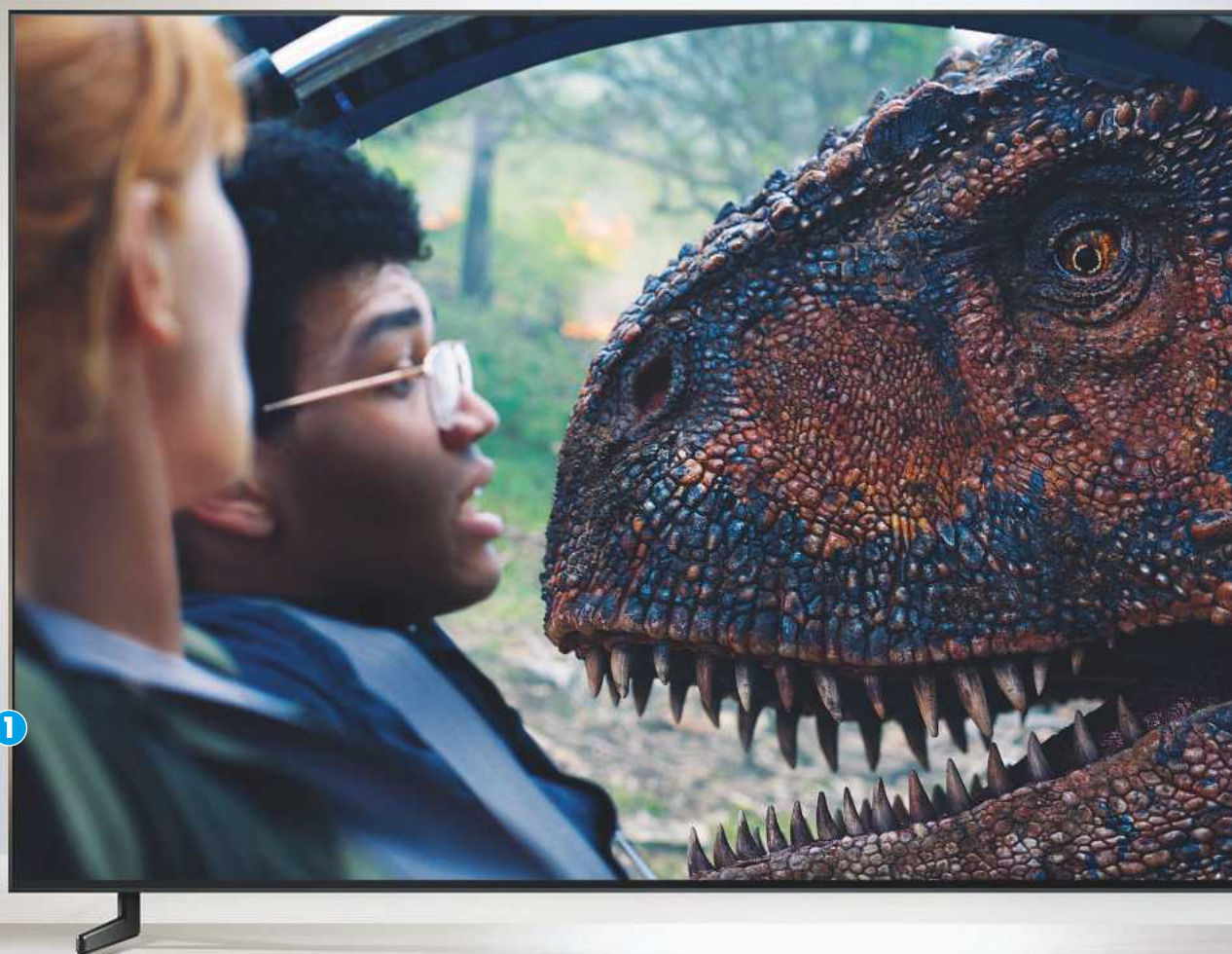


HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

The next level of home cinema?



Samsung has delivered the first 8K TV – **John Archer** ignores the price tag and focuses on what it can do to his UHD disc collection



**DINO
ROARS**
It's back to Isla
Nublar for *Jurassic
World: Fallen
Kingdom* p92

**HOME
CINEMA**
Choice
REFERENCE STATUS

Just as when 4K displays were first announced, the early buzz around 8K TVs has been predominantly negative. 'Who needs 8K when 4K content is still barely a thing?' has been the cry. Often followed by, 'I bet you can't see any difference between 4K and 8K anyway.' But I've got news for all the naysayers, having spent time with Samsung's QE85Q900R: 8K TV is absolutely brilliant.

Right from the off this cutting-edge display makes an impact thanks to a mammoth 85in screen. The format's 33 million pixels will always have more impact on a bigger canvas, so it's probably no surprise that Samsung has chosen to kick off its 8K campaign in such king-sized style, although there are also 75in and 65in variants.

The size of this TV will, of course, limit the QE85Q900R's appeal. As will its £15,000 asking price. That said, 85 inches is squarely in home cinema territory. And, actually, £15,000 is not as crazily expensive for such a groundbreaking (and big) TV as might have been expected.

Making a connection

Aside from its size, the set's main design features are its external One Connect box (which means just one cable goes into the screen), and its low-power Ambient Mode. This lets you put one of your own digital photos or a digital artwork/screen saver on the screen when you're not watching it, so you're not left with a gaping 85in black hole in your room.

The One Connect box's connections chiefly comprise four HDMI ports, three USBs, and the now *de rigueur* Bluetooth and wired/wireless network connections. There is a catch with the HDMI ports, though: none are built to the HDMI 2.1 standard. So while they somehow handle some HDMI 2.1 features, including Auto Game mode and Variable Refresh Rate (VRR) gaming support, they can't convey 8K at more than 30 frames a second.

Samsung is, however, working on a new One Connect box that will carry an HDMI 2.1 port. This will ship with Q900R TVs at some point next year, and will also be made available to people who've previously bought a Q900R without the HDMI 2.1 input. The company can't yet confirm, though, the terms on which current buyers might obtain the upgraded box – considering the £15,000 price of this 85in model in particular, you'd hope it might be a free swap.

It turns out that the QE85Q900R is not only a picture quality flagbearer because of its next-gen resolution. This set also hits brightness levels not witnessed before on any consumer television. In fact, while Samsung claims 4,000 nits for the TV, I measured nearer 4,800 in its Dynamic mode (although this drops to around 2,500 with the Movie picture preset selected).

Such high peak brightness means the 85Q900R should take HDR images to all levels of dynamism. 4K Blu-rays mastered to 4,000 nits, meanwhile, ought to spool without needing Samsung's silicon to overtly modify tones and detail in the brightest parts of the picture.

The 85Q900R is one of Samsung's QLED models. In layman's terms this means it produces colour using proprietary Quantum Dots encased in metal 'suits' that enable them to push brightness and colour range.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
85in direct-lit
QLED TV with
local dimming and
8K resolution

POSITION:
Samsung's flagship
flatscreen for 2018

PEERS:
Samsung 75Q9FN;
LG 77OLED8;
Sony KD-75ZD9

1. At 85in, this isn't
the sort of TV you'll
slip unnoticed into
a living room



Sticking with HDR10+

The TV's operating system is the same found on the brand's 4K range – no bad thing given how easy to use it is and full of content options. Only catch, however, is that there's no support for Dolby Vision HDR; as usual with a Samsung TV, the 85Q900R 'sticks' at HLG, HDR10 and HDR10+.

Samsung has, though, developed a new Quantum 8K processing engine for its latest flagship TV, which includes arguably the 85Q900R's most important feature: an 8K

AI upscaler. This draws on a built-in (and updatable via firmware) image database to calculate how to insert the tens of millions of extra pixels required to map 4K and even

HD and SD pictures to the screen's native 7,640 x 4,320 resolution. And it works better than I'd imagined possible.

With 4K sources, such as the beautifully clean 4K Blu-ray of *Ant-Man and The Wasp*, this upscaling is pretty much flawless. It makes images look significantly more detailed and crisp without colour errors, or typical upscaling side effects such as double-edging, shimmering and an unnatural grittiness. Source noise is almost removed during the upscaling process, while even the faint traces of

jaggedness around curved edges you can get with 4K TVs are essentially completely blitzed by the tiny 8K pixels. Just make sure you turn off the TV's Digital Clean View feature with 4K sources, as this can soften some of the detail away.

Even more impressively, the TV's upscaler can handle HD and SD sources well enough to make them look better, rather than the messy horror shows I'd expected.

I'm not suggesting here that HD sources gain an 8K appearance. But they do look tangibly more polished than straight HD images would, with the 8K AI engine removing MPEG compression noise and jagged edges.

Some user input is advised, though. I'd set the Digital Clean View NR tool to Low for HD sources, and switch it to Auto with SD material. And with the latter content, you should only expect the upgrade to look like something just beyond HD rather than 8K.

On the hunt for 8K

I looked first at the 85Q900R's performance with sub-8K sources rather than heading straight for native 8K because, well... native 8K content is pretty much nonexistent right now. Anyone who buys a Q900R in 2018 will be almost completely using it to watch 'regular' sources.

Samsung itself could only provide around six minutes of especially commissioned native 8K footage for review purposes. Yet this actually proved more than enough to

'The detail, clarity, depth and colour resolution in this TV's native 8K images is beyond anything I've seen before'

establish that genuine 8K looks nothing short of sensational. The amount of detail, clarity, depth and colour resolution present in the 85Q900R's native 8K images goes far, far beyond anything I've seen with even the best 4K experience.

What's more, these various advantages are visible from a perfectly reasonable/typical viewing distance of 4-5m. You don't have to stand there with your nose pressed to the screen. Doing so, however, can help you understand why 8K looks so much more like reality than a simple TV picture, as even up close you'll struggle to make out any of the pixel structure, noise or jagged edging.

Presumably the impact of 8K will be less spectacular on the 65in and 75in Q900Rs Samsung is launching. However, the dots-per-inch effect that's made resolution a relevant feature even on smartphones will surely still have some impact. As will, it must be said, the efficiency of your own peepers...

Less clear cut is whether 8K will look as sumptuous on any old TV. After all, on this Samsung all those pixels are backed up by an outstanding squad of supporting picture features.

Contrast, for instance, is immense. The set uses a direct LED lighting system with 480 zones of local dimming to ensure that its searing brightness is partnered with impressive black levels. In fact, despite its size and brightness, it can produce peak HDR picture elements against a near black backdrop – such as the lift that goes up from Churchill's war rooms after his first radio speech in the *Darkest Hour* 4K Blu-ray – with no trace of backlight clouding or blooming at all. The 85Q900R seems even better in this respect than Samsung's Q9FN 4K range.

Backlight management differs from those 4K stablemates in two other ways. First, this model uses a higher base brightness level, allowing you to see more shadow detail in dark areas. This lends HDR images a more balanced and three-dimensional feel. It also leads to another, less positive difference: less deep general black levels.

It's noticeable, too, when running the 85Q900R alongside a Q9FN, that the 8K model takes more brightness out of small HDR highlights than the 4K set, presumably to minimise blooming. However, with bigger bright objects the 85Q900R looks substantially punchier than the Q9FN – still without causing blooming.

Holy colours Batman!

The substantial general brightness means colour volumes are extremely impressive, particularly with Samsung's QLED system on hand to help saturations keep pace. This leads to a new level of expression with the wide colour technology found with most HDR sources. For instance, I've never seen *The LEGO Batman Movie* (Ultra HD Blu-ray), which was made with a deliberately overblown colour palette, look so riotously rich and dynamic.

With 4,000-nit masters such as *It* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* on 4K Blu-ray, the TV copes uniquely well, presenting copious detail in the image's brightest areas.

SPECIFICATIONS

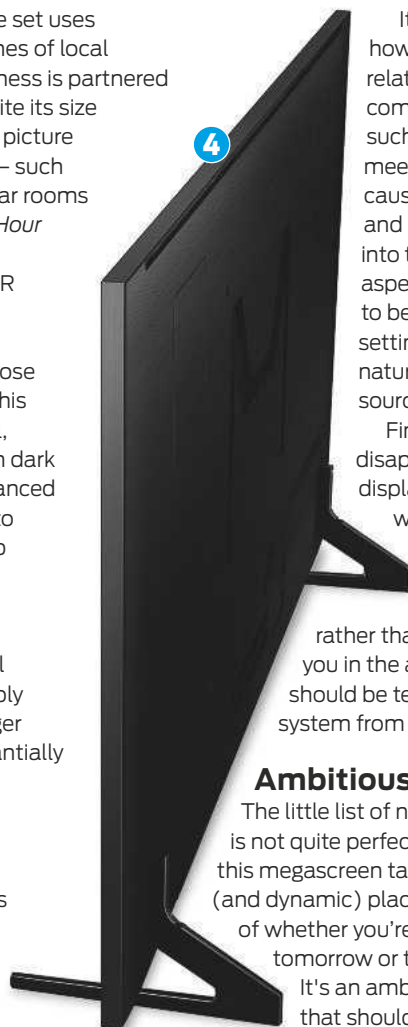
3D: No **4K:** Yes. Actually 8K – 7,640 x 4,320 resolution **HDR:** Yes. HLG; HDR10; HDR10+ **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs (currently 2.0, but one with 2.1 support will feature on One Connect boxes next year); 3 x USB; Ethernet; RF input **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 60W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 4,000 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,905.2(w) x 1,094.2(h) x 35.2(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 56.1kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; multimedia playback; Quantum processor 8K; 8K AI upscaling; QLED technology; Eden 2.0 smart platform; direct LED array with local dimming (480 zones); Bluetooth headphone output

PARTNER WITH



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It's not always a peerless picture, however. Every now and then, with relatively dark sequences that contain a complicated mix of light and dark content, such as some of *Darkest Hour*'s war cabinet meetings, the screen's backlighting can cause colour tones to become a little thin, and some sudden blooming can creep into the black bars above and below wide aspect ratio pictures. And I found you have to be quite careful with the 85Q900R's settings if you want to get a balanced, natural SDR picture that doesn't exaggerate source noise, too.

Finally, the 85Q900R's sound is disappointing. It's free of distortion and displays a decent dynamic range, even with the rich dynamics of *Ant-Man* and *The Wasp*'s 'Quantum Realm' scenes.

But the sound always appears to be coming from behind the screen, rather than taking over the room and immersing you in the action. This is a cinematic display that should be tethered to a home cinema sound system from day one.

Ambitious move

The little list of niggles above reveal that the 85Q900R is not quite perfect. But that doesn't change the fact that this megascreen takes TV picture quality to resolution (and dynamic) places it hasn't gone before – regardless of whether you're watching the native 8K sources of tomorrow or the lower-resolution sources of today. It's an ambitious move from Samsung, and one that should satisfy well-heeled early adopters ■

2. The TV claims a best-in-class 4,000-nit peak brightness

3. Samsung's twin-foot stand has to be rugged enough to carry the TV's 56kg weight

4. The set's LEDs fire from behind the panel, combined with 480-zone dimming

HCC VERDICT



Samsung QE85Q900R

→ £15,000 → www.samsung.com/uk

WE SAY: The 85Q900R doesn't just rely on its 33 million pixels or native 8K content to create a stunning spectacle. Yes, it's expensive, but it's also a reference-grade display.

Just how clever is Yamaha's
AI-enhanced AV processor?
Steve Withers finds out



Surround sound goes sci-fi

Yamaha has been doing multichannel surround and immersive audio longer than just about anyone. In fact, it pioneered the concept of height speakers before Dolby and DTS got in on the act. However, with nearly every AVR marque offering object audio setups with speakers all over the room, it was time for Yamaha to have a rethink. Enter its CX-A5200 processor.

This is the company's new 11-channel Aventure series AV processor, and it boasts Yamaha's latest feature, Surround:AI.

That's right – surround sound with artificial intelligence. Don't worry: this particular AI isn't about to become self-aware and start World War III. Rather, it's a sophisticated AI learning technology that analyses soundtracks and optimises the surround effect in real time.

AI-enhanced surround sound isn't the only thing different on the CX-A5200 compared to the previous CX-A5100 model, although the other changes may not be immediately apparent. It's certainly business as usual as far as the design goes, with the usual AV processor layout in a choice of black or titanium, both featuring a two-tone gloss and brushed-metal finish.

The CX-A5200 is built like the proverbial brick outhouse, with the kind of dimensions and weight that would put many an AV receiver to shame. The heft is all the more impressive when you remember there's no amplification inside the massive chassis, and you're left with a processor that looks and feels like a serious high-end product.

Look around the back and you'll start to see some changes, although most of them are justified. For a start Yamaha has dropped the AM tuner, although there's still FM and now a DAB radio as well. One of the component video inputs and all the component and composite video outputs have been ditched, but a third HDMI output for a second zone has been added.

There's now also a second antenna for a stronger Wi-Fi and Bluetooth signal, so if you want to stream from your home network, via a Bluetooth device, or even using Apple AirPlay, you can. All the other connections remain the same as the CX-A5100, which means you get 11.2-channel pre-outs, with a choice of phono or balanced XLR connectors.

1. Wanna play? The CX-A5200 offers 34 different DSP modes

2. The processor offers backlit remote and app control



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
11-channel AV
processor with
Surround:AI

POSITION:
The big daddy of
Yamaha's AV lineup

PEERS:
Marantz AV8805;
Arcam AV860;
Anthem AVM 60



3

There have been changes on the inside too, with Yamaha adopting upgraded 384kHz/32-bit ESS Sabre Pro DACs, and adding a redesigned power transformer to ensure these new devices perform to their maximum potential. Hi-res audio support includes FLAC to 384kHz/24-bit and WAV/AIFF up to 384kHz/32-bit.

Along with Surround:AI, Yamaha has included the latest version of its CINEMA DSP HD3 processor, which applies algorithms to any audio feed to create a specific acoustical signature from dozens of different venues. So if you fancy recreating the sound of a Tokyo church while watching *Bad Boys*, Yamaha has you covered.

The rest of the features are what you'd expect to see on a range-topping AV processor. There's support for both Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, and, on the video side of things,

'The Surround:AI processing seems to draw every tiny detail out of a soundmix and turns it up to eleven'

the Yamaha can pass 4K/60p at 4:4:4, and upscale to 4K, while the seven HDMI inputs and three outputs are all 2.0b, meaning they can handle HDR including HLG and Dolby Vision.

The CX-A5200 also has Yamaha's MusicCast multiroom system built-in, delivering a host of music streaming services including Spotify, Tidal, Deezer, and Qobuz. It even works with Amazon Alexa for voice control, although setting this up is fiddly and using it is often frustrating. Mind you, the CX-A5200 is hardly short of control options.

First there's the remote which I was delighted to discover has been redesigned, with a mass of tiny buttons

replaced by a more logical layout. There's a useful backlight as well, but unfortunately the rubber keys are almost flush with the surface of the handset.

For 'phone addicts, Yamaha's AV Controller is easily one of the best remote apps I've ever used, with a well-designed and comprehensive interface that makes driving the CX-A5200 much easier. There's also the superior MusicCast Controller for using the processor as part of a multiroom system.

At long last Yamaha has updated the menu system on its AV products, and the user interface now looks like it was developed in this century. Unfortunately, once you drill down, you realise that beneath the surface gloss it's still the same basic platform. I've never found Yamaha AV products particularly intuitive to set up and that hasn't really changed here, with the company still using some confusing terminology.

As soon as you plug in the provided setup microphone, the YPAO room correction process begins. A stand included in the box lets you take measurements from different locations, angles and heights in order to more accurately analyse the room's acoustical properties. I've always found YPAO struggling to correctly handle the bass frequencies in my room, and that view hasn't changed. Personally I prefer the laptop-based approach of Anthem Room Correction or Dirac Live, as well as their detailed graphical feedback.

Yamaha makes the MX-A5200 11-channel power amplifier to go with the CX-A5200, but unfortunately one wasn't available for this review. Instead I used an IOTA AVXPI seven-channel amp to drive the ear-level channels, and my Arcam P429 for four overheads.

Living on the Edge

What better way to kick things off than the beach assault repeated throughout the Blu-ray of *Edge of Tomorrow*.

4



This is easily one of the most dynamic 7.1 mixes around, with explosions emanating from seemingly everywhere and giant helicopters crashing down from above.

The CX-A5200 handled this sonic chaos with ease, placing sounds around the room with precision, and effortlessly steering effects from one speaker to another. I had tweaked the YPAO setup myself, and as a result the bass performance was much improved, with military-grade ordinance shaking the room.

There's a button on the remote called 'AI': press this and you can turn the Surround:AI feature on and off. When you do so, you're informed via the onscreen display, and a little AI logo lights up on the front of the processor.

I'll admit to being dubious about the AI processing at first; we seem to be getting AI with everything these days, and it's only a matter of time before some manufacturer incorporates it into a toaster. However it really works here. The processing seems to draw every tiny detail out of the mix, taking what was already a fairly aggressive sound design and turning it up to eleven.

The effect was quite pronounced on *Edge of Tomorrow*, and even though this was 'only' a 7.1 soundtrack it suddenly felt even more immersive. The effects were defined, the explosions had more impact, and the dialogue was more focused. I'm sure that purists will criticise such on-the-fly processing as deviating from a sound mixer's intent, but its more in-your-face nature is probably what most people want when they invest large sums of money in an AV setup.

The dynamism and expression I'd enjoyed with *Edge of Tomorrow* was writ large when I moved to the vehicular madness of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (4K BD) in Dolby Atmos. Here the CX-A5200 produced a massive soundstage that was peppered with effects. The chase through the sandstorm is the definition of immersive; the wind howls, and the sounds of revving engines – and the explosions of vehicles as they tumble through the air – are defined within the storm. And yet within all this the Yamaha delivered dialogue with perfectly intelligibility.

With the Atmos mix of *A Quiet Place* (4K Blu-ray), the Yamaha proved it wasn't all about big explosions and snarling engines. The sound design here creates the impression of silence, without actually being silent, and the CX-A5200 was able to pick up all the delicate audio cues within the mix; it had the gossamer light touch of the best AV processors. Having said that, when it needs to step up a gear, it has the dynamism to make you jump out of your seat. When the monsters attack the house, the sudden

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **THX:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** Yes. 5.1 phono **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes. 11.2 phono and XLR **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** None – processor only **MULTIROOM:** Yes. 4 x zones, plus MusicCast **AV INPUTS:** 6 x digital audio (3 x optical; 3 x coaxial) **HDMI:** Yes. 7 x inputs; 3 outputs **COMPONENT VIDEO:** Yes. 2 x inputs **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. To 4K/60p **DIMENSIONS:** 435(w) x 474(d) x 193(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 15.2kg

FEATURES: YPAO calibration; iOS and Android control apps; Surround:AI; Cinema DSP HD3; Amazon Alexa voice control; DLNA networking; Ethernet; Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; USB; AirPlay; internet radio; Spotify Connect; FM tuner; DAB tuner; HDCP 2.2; 4K 50/60p passthrough; 4:4:4 sub-sampling; HDR10; HLG; Dolby Vision; 384kHz/32-bit DACs; Pure Direct mode; DSD, FLAC, WAV and ALAC hi-res support

PARTNER WITH



YAMAHA MX-A5200: Give this 11-channel processor 11 channels of power with Yamaha's new multichannel amp, due early next year. Rated at 11 x 190W, it features balanced XLR inputs and gold-plated speaker terminals. Pricing is still TBC.

shift in volume is quite terrifying, the use of the overhead channels highly effective, and the bass often seismic. The CX-A5200 made that shift from near silence to full volume without missing a beat.

This sense of power and dynamic range also applied when I put on the 4K platter of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (DTS:X). As the Dementors search the Hogwarts Express, the CX-A5200 revealed its ability to reconcile every aspect of the sound designer's art. There's a crack of thunder and the patter of rain hitting a window, followed by the huge bass impact of the train lurching to a standstill. Then comes the sound of ice forming and cracking, and a deathly cold fills the air. It's so visceral that you feel like you need a coat, and the Dementor's scream is ear-piercing. This processor's ability to not only marshal all the speakers at its disposal, but combine them into a realistically cohesive soundstage really impresses.

Highly competitive

The CX-A5200 is another great example of Yamaha's multichannel expertise. The AI embellishment feels less like a gimmick and more of a genuine feature that can enhance your enjoyment of surround soundtracks. I'm not so enamoured of all the DSP settings, which do feel like a gimmick to me, but I know they have their fans.

If you already own the CX-A5100, Surround:AI might not be a compelling reason to upgrade; the predecessor is still a cracking processor. But if you're thinking of going the separates route and building a multichannel system, the CX-A5200 is a serious contender. It looks great and sounds even better, has a host of features and the build quality of a Rolls Royce, and a price that is highly competitive. Best of all, it can make your surround sound smarter... ■

3. In addition to 7-in/3-out HDMI, the processor packs plenty of legacy analogue and digital inputs

4. Beneath the pull-down flap are the YPAO mic input and headphone jack

HCC VERDICT



Yamaha CX-A5200

→ £2,600 → uk.yamaha.com

WE SAY: Thanks to some high IQ wizardry this AV processor enhances immersive audio with a soundstage that's as expressive and dynamic as it is enjoyable.

The VSX-933 caters to all your wireless music needs but is a fine home cinema amp too, says **Mark Craven**

Pioneer AVR streams on

1. The redesigned remote makes the AVR easy to use

2. Pioneer hasn't changed the VSX styling much...

The term 'AV receiver' used to denote a multichannel amp with a built-in radio tuner. It's even more apt now, with modern AVRs accepting any wireless source you can think of. Pioneer's VSX-933 is a case in point. It may be affordable, but it's blessed with rich functionality.

Wrapping your head around the receiver's audio capabilities takes some time, because Pioneer has adopted a broad brush approach. Most traditionally, the VSX-933 features an onboard FM/AM tuner (there's no DAB), plus media file playback via USB or a home network, including 24-bit/192kHz FLAC, WAV and ALAC, plus DSD 5.2MHz. There's also built-in Bluetooth, for streaming from any BT device.

In addition to this, Pioneer handily adds Chromecast Built-in, enabling easy hookup of compatible apps. There's also Apple AirPlay, and a level of integration for those with Sonos Connect hardware. Pioneer's Remote App, meanwhile, introduces Tidal, Deezer and Spotify streaming services.

As for multiroom, the VSX-933, like the rest of the Pioneer stable, is a bit confusing. While Denon, Marantz, Yamaha and Sony all, to an extent, have developed their own ecosystems, this receiver can work with DTS Play-Fi speakers (a platform that will get a shrug from most UK buyers, as most compatible models are from US brands). It also supports the FlareConnect standard (as do AVRs from stablemate Onkyo). You may not have heard of FlareConnect. Pioneer offers its own MRX-5 and MRX-3 speakers, and says 'other brands will be offering FlareConnect in the near future if they are not already doing so.'

Seventh heaven

The meat and potatoes of this AVR is, of course, its multichannel movie side. It's a seven-channel design, allowing for 5.1.2 Dolby Atmos/DTS:X setups, straight 7.1, or 5.1 with an additional second zone. Nine speaker terminals provide flexibility for switching between installations.



Seven channels isn't cutting-edge when it comes to home cinema sound, but realistically is as immersive as most AVR buyers probably want to go. The VSX-933 also caters to those with even more minimalist aspirations, offering a Dolby Atmos Surround Enhancer tool to add a *faux* L/R surround effect to a 3.1.2 configuration.

The receiver looks much like any other mid-range model, with its symmetrical fascia and central display panel. Yet Pioneer has chosen not to hide its front inputs behind a drop-down flap, instead scattering them left and right. There are USB, mic, headphone and 3.5mm terminals here, but no quick-fire HDMI (unlike the previous VSX-930 receiver). All six of the VSX-933's HDMI inputs, plus its singular output (again, this series used to have twin HDMI outs), are housed on the rear, joined by an adequate selection of digital and analogue audio ports, and twin subwoofer pre-outs.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Seven-channel
Atmos/DTS:X
receiver

POSITION:
Mid-range – and
currently Pioneer's
only seven-channel
model

PEERS:
Denon AVR-X2500H;
Yamaha RX-V485

Handy handset

Pioneer's new remote can feel a bit lightweight in the hand but I'm a fan of the stripped-back design. For too long affordable receivers have been supplied with button-heavy zappers that are simply too confusing for their target audience.

For calibration, you get the brand's mic-assisted MCACC setup suite. This is a fairly quick process (supporting a single listening positioning measurement), involving ear-bothering test tones. Once finished, you should certainly double check its speaker distance measurements, as I had to tweak one that was inaccurate.

While an affordable model, the VSX-933 still comes with a moderate level of user control that may or may not appeal – the MCACC EQ results can be altered on a per-speaker level, with up to three personal setups then saved. And in use, the AVR offers easy access to tone



control, centre and sub level (useful), Dynamic Range Control for late-night/low-level listening and more. And then there are the usual DSP modes to sample – Action, Rock, Pop, Sports, Drama, etc. The impact of MCACC can be flicked on/off, but there are no different presets offered, beyond a 'Theater Filter' that alters high-frequency roll-off.

Multichannel muscle

Laced up to a Focal Sib Evo 5.1.2 Atmos system, this receiver shares similarities with affordable Pioneers of yore. It sounds muscular and attacks film soundmixes with glee, making up for a lack of high-frequency nuance and insight with a full-blooded approach. Most importantly, it sounds well-oiled, not the least bit sluggish.

The failed terror attack in *Justice League* (Sky Cinema, Dolby Atmos) gives it plenty to do. Danny Elfman's *Batman*-throwback score bounces around the soundfield, perky and playful, while panicked screams echo in the background. When Wonder Woman crashes through the door, the Pioneer's Direct Energy amps go to the well for this dynamic surge, joined by a delicious crack of wood and one of Hollywood's trademark bass swells. Although you wouldn't want to use this bargain-priced receiver to drive power-hungry, largescale speakers or fill a cavernous cinema room, it has enough for its likely end user.

Lowering the subwoofer level from that set by MCACC gave me a better balance; beyond that I was happy to leave Pioneer's EQ left on. In truth, though, there wasn't a night/day difference.

Ol' fashioned 5.1 surround sound can still get the juices flowing, as evidenced by this Pioneer chewing on the DTS-HD MA 5.1 *Predator* soundmix (Ultra HD Blu-ray). The ambience of the jungle is well-crafted, the alien's idiosyncratic noises resonant in the soundfield and the AVR's robust mid-range delivery works wonders with Alan Silvestri's score.

A minor criticism is the VSX-933 falls somewhat short when a scene is quieter and the onscreen visuals call for a delicate approach. It's a receiver that's happier with the bombast and bruising bass of a blockbuster Blu-ray, nailing the drama and excitement of, say, *Fast & Furious 5*'s bank vault drive-away (Blu-ray), while needing a little more airiness and an enveloping approach to convey the rich ambience of the naturalistic soundscapes of *The Revenant* (Ultra HD Blu-ray).

A word on the VSX-933's menus. The overhauled homescreen/user interface is a success; sharply presented,

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **THX:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 7 x 135W (6 ohms, 1 kHz, 1.0% THD, one channel driven) **MULTIROOM:** Yes. Zone 2 **AV INPUTS:** 2 x digital inputs (1 x optical and 1 x coaxial) **HDMI:** Yes. 6 x inputs; 1 x output **COMPONENT VIDEO:** Yes. 1 x input **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. To 4K **DIMENSIONS:** 435(w) x 173(d) x 370.5(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 9.6kg

FEATURES: Dual-band Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; Ethernet; USB; MCACC auto calibration; AM/FM tuner; Pioneer Remote App; Spotify, Tidal and Deezer streaming service integration; Apple AirPlay; TuneIn 'net radio; hi-res file playback includes 192kHz/24-bit ALAC, AIFF, FLAC and WAV, plus 5.6MHz DSD; 384kHz/32-bit AKM DAC; HDR passthrough including Dolby Vision; DTS Play-Fi; FlareConnect

PARTNER WITH



DEEZER HI-FI: This goes one up on Spotify by delivering CD-quality FLAC streams, albeit for a £20 monthly premium. You'll find the majority of tracks are offered lossless, and the 'Flow' function is a good tool for discovering new music.

colourful and quick to get to grips with. Yet the onscreen display window, called up via the AV Adjust button on the handset (which you'll probably use quite regularly) looks like it's fallen out of a ZX Spectrum.

Fire up and enjoy

There's a lot on offer here when it comes to streaming audio, and a cinematic sound performance that is fun if a little unrefined, and for £470 warrants few complaints. Pioneer has improved usability via its new remote and UI, but limited system flexibility a tad by whipping out the front HDMI input and second output of previous 93x models. While the basic MCACC implementation won't wow EQ freaks, it does make this an easy receiver for AV novices to fire up and enjoy. Recommended ■

HCC VERDICT



Pioneer VSX-933

→ £470 → www.pioneer-audiovisual.eu

WE SAY: Thrilling with blockbuster movies and well-specified when it comes to streaming audio, Pioneer's seven-channel receiver is worthy of consideration.

3



3. The nine speaker terminals let you wire up for both 7.1 main and stereo second zones



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Steve Withers samples Monitor Audio's budget floorstanding speaker option

Orange: the new black?

Monitor Audio has broken with tradition recently, eschewing its normal habit of naming a speaker range after a precious metal, and going for something a bit more prosaic instead. The brand famous for its Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum ranges appears to have lost its copy of the periodic table.

The two most recent additions to its lineup are the high-end Studio, and the more wallet-friendly Monitor. The latter is particularly interesting because it appears to promise Monitor Audio performance for those on a budget. The new range includes the 300 (£550p/p) and 200 (£400p/p) floorstanders; the 100 (£200p/p) and 50 (£160p/p) bookshelf speakers; the C150 (£140) centre speaker; and the MRW-10 active subwoofer (£350).

You can obviously build a system using different combinations of speakers, and there's nothing stopping you from adding as many channels as you like. Monitor Audio doesn't make a dedicated Dolby Atmos unit, but it does make in-ceiling models for the custom install market which could be used for the overhead channels.

For this review, I ran a 5.1 system with a pair of 200s and a C150 at the front, a pair of 50s for the surrounds, and a MRW-10 for the low-end grunt. That lot will set you back £1,050, which is pretty good value.

The question is: how many corners has Monitor Audio had to cut to hit this lower price point? To be honest, my initial impressions weren't encouraging; clearly the design team was given a day off when the Monitors were conceived: these are easily the most boring speakers I've seen in a while.

It's almost as though Monitor Audio realised this, and quickly added the orange bass drivers to give the speakers a 'playful twist', as the company puts it. I know beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but to me they just make an already budget speaker look even more budget. I definitely prefer my drivers black.

Borrowing from Bronze

All speakers in the range are plain wooden boxes, with a grey baffle and a choice of black, white or walnut matt finishes. There are also black cloth grilles, which use fasteners rather than magnets to attach to the baffle. The floorstanders include outrigger feet to improve stability, and there are two sets of binding posts for those who bi-wire.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Affordable 5.1 speaker system

POSITION:
Sits below Bronze on the Monitor Audio podium

PEERS:
Q Acoustics 3000i; Acoustic Energy 100; Polk Signature

I. Want to go bigger?
A Monitor 300 tower speaker, with twin 6.5 woofers, is available

While the design and build quality of the Monitors might reflect the range's entry-level aspirations, Monitor Audio has at least trickled down innovations from its award-winning Bronze range. All the speakers use 1in C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium Magnesium) dome tweeters, and those orange translucent 5.5in MMP II (Metal Matrix Polymer) driver cones. That's good news, because you can mix and match speakers from the range and keep the system tonally balanced.

The floorstanding 200 partners its tweeter with both a midrange and bass driver. The cabinet has a dual chamber construction, and rear HiVe II (High Velocity, Low Noise Reflex Port) bass ports – one at the top and one towards the bottom. These are designed to improve transient response and tighten bass. The 200 claims a frequency reach of 40Hz-30kHz, and a sensitivity of 88dB.

The traditionally designed C150 centre speaker uses two midbass drivers positioned either side of a central tweeter, and a sealed cabinet. Frequency response is rated at 60Hz-30kHz. The 50 speaker, on the other hand, catches the eye with an unusual cube-shaped cabinet; its tweeter is positioned in the top corner (with each speaker in a pair mirroring the other) to reduce the size of the enclosure. The cabinet is rear ported, but there's still a screw-fitting at the rear for wall-mounting.

The last part of our package is Monitor Audio's MRW-10 subwoofer. This uses a (black) 10in driver, mounted in an 18mm-thick MDF cabinet with rear porting. An onboard 100W Class D amp provides the low-end punch. The controls are fairly basic, but there are three preset EQ mode settings (Music, Movie, Impact) to play with.

This 5.1 package was tested as part of two different systems – first I used my reference Arcam AVR850 to drive the five speakers, before switching to a Yamaha CX-A5200 processor (see p42) and IOTA power amp combo – and my concerns over design and build quality were effectively banished once I started listening. Monitor Audio knows a thing or two about crafting speakers, >

and these new boxes delivered a performance that rates well considering their collective price.

X marks the spot

The original *X-Men* trilogy on 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks on the discs (6.1 in the case of the third film, but who's counting), seemed ideal demo material, so I set about choosing suitable scenes. I began with one in the first movie where Wolverine wakes up in an underground complex. It's a quiet scene, with a number of subtle atmospheric cues that proved a great test of this system's detail retrieval and ability to deliver a coherent soundstage. It also has Professor X's voice emanating from different locations around the room, moving from channel to channel, which makes it a good barometer of tonal balance. The Monitors passed both tests with flying colours, creating a soundstage that retained focus and intelligibility.

These are excellent traits, but sometimes you want to crank things up and let a package assault you with its sonic soundscapes. Nightcrawler's attack on the US President at the start of *X-Men 2* remains an aural treat as he teleports

'Explosions in *X-Men: The Last Stand* tore through the room with a visceral reality, and debris filled the air'

around the room taking out Secret Service agents left, right and centre. The system showed wonderful timing and energy, with a precise pop as Nightcrawler instantaneously moves from one speaker to another.

The floorstanders delivered an excellent bass presence at the front of the room, sounding deeper and bigger than they actually are, and assuaging my fears that they felt a bit light and flimsy as I was installing them. The subwoofer also played its part, adding some efficient low-end thump to proceedings, and giving Nightcrawler's kicks extra impact. This Monitor pack not only generates plenty of low-frequency energy, but effectively integrates it between the speakers and the sub.

All of these strengths came into play as I watched the Danger Room scene at the start of *X-Men: The Last Stand*. In a training session that would never pass health and safety regulations these days, the younger X-Men (that

SPECIFICATIONS

Monitor 200

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in C-CAM tweeter; 1 x 5.5in MMP II midbass driver; 1 x 5.5in MMP II woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Twin rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-30kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 88dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 120W **DIMENSIONS:** 850(h) x 174(w) x 299(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 10.8kg

Monitor C150

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in C-CAM tweeter; 2 x 5.5in MMP II midbass drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed cabinet **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 60Hz-30kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 88dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 100W **DIMENSIONS:** 174(h) x 455(w) x 188(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.4kg

Monitor 50

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in C-CAM tweeter; 1 x 5.5in MMP II midbass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 55Hz-30kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 70W **DIMENSIONS:** 206(h) x 260(w) x 238(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.56kg

Monitor MRW-10 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in MMP II long-throw woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 30Hz-120Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 100W RMS Class D amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 336(h) x 320(w) x 351(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 10.54kg **FEATURES:** Stereo phono input; LFE input; 12V trigger; Movie, Music and Impact EQ presets; crossover, volume and phase control; auto standby

PARTNER WITH



DENON AVR-X2400H: Keep your system costs down with this 7 x 90W AVR that launched at £500 but now sells for around £350. As well as DTS:X/Atmos decoding (for a 5.1.2 setup), it has HEOS integration and HDR passthrough (incl. Dolby Vision) on its feature list.

really should be X-People) are put through their paces. Explosions tore through the soundfield with a visceral reality, and debris filled the air. Effects steering was savagely precise, while the MRW-10 woofer ensured you felt the effects as well as heard them.

And in amongst this cacophony of destruction, dialogue remained clear and focused. The C150 proved to be a capable centre speaker, working in unison with the more potent left and right floorstanders while keeping dialogue anchored to the screen.

There's a pleasing musicality to these speakers as well, as evidenced during the opening sequences of the trilogy. Each film begins with a voiceover from Patrick Stewart, before launching into the now-familiar *X-Men* theme. The music was spread across the front of my room, oozing extra width and drawing me into the epic orchestration.

Cost-effective contenders

To a large part these boxes live up to their 'Monitor' name, with a sound that's uncoloured and coherent, combined with a sense of scale and well-integrated bass. You may not be entirely convinced by the orange drivers and unrefined styling, but in performance terms they impress ■

2. The Monitor 50 speaker uses an unusual cube-shaped cabinet

2



HCC VERDICT

★★★★★

Monitor Audio Monitor 5.1

→ £1,050 → www.monitoraudio.com

WE SAY: Monitor Audio has cut a few corners to get the price down but orange drivers aside, the Monitors make a good-sounding budget speaker package.



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UHD Blu-ray deck's multi-HDR support, awesome build quality and premium performance dazzles [Steve May](#)

Panasonic flagship is the HDR boss

The DP-UB9000 is an Ultra HD Blu-ray player of few compromises and many pleasures. The most ambitious disc spinner so far to emerge from Panasonic, this high-end deck is unique in offering both Dolby Vision and HDR10+ dynamic metadata support, alongside HDR10 and HLG. And that's just the tip of an iceberg of functionality.

My first thought when unboxing was that someone had bungled the retail price. The UB9000 looks considerably posher than you might expect for the sub-£1K tag. Attention to detail is awe-inspiring.

A two-layer steel construction means the deck is reassuringly weighty. There's no simple chassis sleeve here. The double-layer top plate and aluminium side plate are separately bolted, and the base of the chassis, also dual-layer, consists of 1.2mm and 1.6mm sheets. If there's anything inside, it's not getting out.



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AV INFO

PRODUCT:
High-end Ultra HD
Blu-ray player

POSITION:
Panasonic's flagship
disc spinner

PEERS:
Pioneer UDP-
LX500;
Cambridge Audio
CXUHD

1. The DP-UB9000 ramps up the build quality over previous Panasonic 4K decks

2. The handset includes Playback Info and HDR Setting keys

Corners are rolled and smooth. A hairline finish on the front panel lends the player a minimalistic, upmarket demeanour. Four substantial isolating feet have anti-slip pads. Once down, it stays planted.

Connections are generous, too. In addition to two HDMI outputs (one for audio only), there are two USB ports (one a fast v3.0), optical and coaxial digital audio outputs, stereo analogue phonos and a full 7.1-channel output, plus balanced XLR stereo connectors. Ethernet is provided to support internal Wi-Fi.

Powered up, it's clear there's been a minor cosmetic upgrade to the user interface (it's a little cleaner), but the navigation is unchanged from the rest of the Panasonic BD fleet. There are buttons for Videos, Music, Photos, Home Network, Network Service and Setup.

Unlike the now departed Oppo UDP-205 and UDP-203 players, and the incoming Pioneer UDP-LX500 and UDP-LX800 UHD machines, Panasonic hasn't shortchanged users on streaming apps. The familiar-looking service portal supplies Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, BBC News/Sport, plus the Berlin Philharmoniker channel. I would have liked to have seen a greater focus on streaming audio services, but I suppose you can't have everything.

Check out my data talents!

Once spinning a disc, it doesn't take long to discover the in-depth Playback Info screen – given that you can

access it directly from the IR remote control. Amid a bunch of useful disc information, it rather helpfully reads HDR10 metadata, revealing Maximum Frame-Average Light Level (MaxFALL) and Maximum Content Light Level (MaxCLL) figures from playing platters. For example, I'm told that *Pacific Rim: Uprising* (one of the UHD titles used to assess image quality) was mastered for 1,000 nits and has an MaxFALL of 863 nits. This kind of minutia is endless fascinating in a geeky sort of way.

'Corners are rolled and smooth, and the hairline finish lends the player an upmarket demeanour'

While not every disc proffers MaxFALL and MaxCLL info (*Star Wars: The Last Jedi* is blank on the subject, presumably because such levels weren't set in the metadata), knowing that *Despicable Me 2* boasts a max average HDR brightness of 553 nits is certain to make me a big hit at parties.

Ultimately, the *raison d'être* of the DP-UB9000 is image quality. The visuals from this deck, which has THX 4K HDR Source certification, are positively jaw-dropping. Intensely detailed, with wide smooth colour, it presents peerless pictures.



3



Some of this prowess can be attributed to Panasonic's second-generation HCX video processor. An evolution of what we saw in the earlier well-specified DMP-UB900 (launched in 2016), it includes a number of HDR refinements, including an HDR Optimizer to partner the player with a display.

This latter adjustment is powerful but intuitive to use. You can select OLED, High Luminance Projector, Basic Luminance Projector, Super High Luminance LCD, Middle or High Luminance LCD and Basic Luminance LCD – choose which best describes your display.

The Optimizer aims to prevent clipping on lower-brightness TVs/projectors by setting a tone map target and carrying out metadata conversion in the player. Panasonic's reasoning is that not all TVs will accurately tone map (that's to say, compensate for any shortfalls in luminance), particularly when content has been mastered above 1,000 nits, leading to (for example) bleached-out white cloudy skies, lacking in no apparent detail. The Optimizer was tried with a Sony LED LCD TV of only middling HDR brightness, and worked well. Compensation is scalable, too – the HDR Optimizer can set a specific tone map luminance. This is a powerful tuning tool.

High-precision hues

Beyond this, there's not a great deal required during setup. The DP-UB9000 will cope with most situations in Auto mode.

A 4K High Precision chroma processor and Multi-Tap filter are employed to interpolate a 4K 4:4:4 video output from 4K 4:2:0 content. This isn't new; Panasonic has had

'Colour saturation and gradations appear flawless. *Despicable Me 2* glows with gloriously rendered primaries'

the technology for some years. It's designed to produce a more saturated, yet smooth, response than conventional processing, and works with both UHD discs and network streaming services.

A magnified snapshot of a 4K zone plate chroma frequency response test confirms perfectly delineated micro curves, with no coarse stepping. Smooth colour

4



detail, authentic to the source, makes its imagery suitably cinematic.

Vibrancy and HDR pizzazz are class-leading. *Pacific Rim: Uprising* is a gorgeously clean and dynamic UHD disc, with oodles of fine detail and crisp, grain-free visual effects. Played on the DP-UB9000, the action becomes almost mesmerizing. When the rogue Jaeger, Obsidian Fury, first attacks, the deck renders every aspect of the fast-moving fight with three-dimensional precision. I wasn't looking at the picture, I was looking into it.

Colour saturation and gradations appear flawless. The animation in *Despicable Me 2*, another Dolby Vision HDR release, glows with gloriously rendered primaries and tight, bright highlights.

Rattle and hum? Nope

In use, the DP-UB9000 is agile and stable. The chassis features a newly developed drive base and centre mechanism, and the drive sits within a vibration-reducing cradle. There's no rattle when loading discs, with the mechanism proving smooth and rigid, and disc loading is fast, taking a Java-heavy movie Blu-ray from tray to main menu in 40 seconds.

If the DP-UB9000 does have an Achilles' heel, it's sonic. Despite its premium positioning, this isn't a universal disc player, and won't spin Super Audio CD or DVD-Audio – it's CD only. Those with treasured collections of formative high-res formats may find this omission a bitter pill.

That said, Panasonic hasn't skimped on the audio specification. The deck employs a 768kHz/32-bit AK4493 DAC for its two-channel output, and to further help preserve audio integrity there's a dedicated power supply plus a special circuit board for the analogue audio output that routes left and right channels through a low-noise op-amp to those balanced XLR outputs. There's also an HDMI low-jitter clock process, if that's your preferred interconnect option.

Don't get me wrong. CD playback is unquestionably good, even occasionally excellent when fed premium CDs that have been mastered with care. However its character is somewhat acerbic. The more I listened to the deck, the more I found its CD playback a tad fatiguing. I began to notice a slight sense of distortion, or buzz, on some harmonics. I'm being pedantic, but only because this calibre of kit deserves it.

The deck is hi-res audio compliant, though, and will handle DSD and 24-bit FLAC files (amongst others). These sound far more fabulous. If your high-res interests lie with files, streaming and Blu-ray Audio discs, the DP-UB9000 doesn't disappoint.

The top of the tree

With its beautiful battleship build and class-leading video quality, the DP-UB9000 can be considered a steal for the asking price. Panasonic has nailed the high-end aesthetic too. Yes, it borrows a bit from the Oppo playbook, but seemingly no expense has been spared in its construction. It's a gorgeous thing.

Usability is also excellent. That Playback Info screen has huge nerd appeal, and the provision of both Dolby Vision and HDR10+ support makes it a unique HDR proposition. Your chosen TV will most likely only support one of these dynamic HDR standards, but at least the deck has pan-HDR user appeal. Panasonic would no doubt have

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes **ULTRA HD:** Yes **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HDR10+; Dolby Vision **UPSCALING:** Yes. 2160p **MULTIREGION:** No. Region B BD/R2 DVD **HDMI:** 2 x outputs (one audio only) **MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE:** Yes. 7.1 phono **DIGITAL AUDIO:** Yes. Optical/coaxial outputs **ETHERNET:** Yes **BUILT IN WI-FI:** Yes **SACD/DVD-A:** No/No **DIMENSIONS:** 430(w) x 81(h) x 300(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.8kg

FEATURES: 2 x USB ports (one v3.0); HX image processor; smart portal with streaming video services; DLNA media playback (DSD, FLAC, WAV, AIFF, ALAC, MP3, MKV); HLG compatible; HDR Optimizer; stereo balanced XLR output; HDR-SDR conversion; 4K Chroma Processing

PARTNER WITH



PANASONIC TX-65FZ802: This 65in 4K HDR OLED TV can be purchased for around £2,800. While not a Dolby Vision model, it does support HDR10+ (as does the UB9000), and offers a finessed and accurate picture performance.

liked some HDR10+ discs to have arrived by now, but can't be blamed for the delay.

Audio performance is very good, although I'd venture to say it's not audiophile-grade, at least when it comes to CD playback. There's an indefinable grittiness that gives it a sharp edge. Stick with hi-res files and your ears will have few complaints.

And image quality? The provision of extensive video adjustment, with HDR optimisation that offers a real-world benefit and a 4K Chroma processor that paints with supreme artistry, put this deck at the top of tree ■

3. Audio outputs are coaxial, optical, balanced XLR and analogue stereo/7.1

4. The deck weighs 7.8kg, in part due to its double-layer chassis design

5. The player has earned THX 4K HDR Source certification

HCC VERDICT



Panasonic DP-UB9000

→ £850 → www.panasonic.co.uk

WE SAY: The DP-UB9000 is the 4K Blu-ray player AV-hedz have been waiting for. With multi-HDR support and a build Arnie would be proud of, this is a home cinema dream machine.



Sony adds style to OLED TV



BACK IN TIME

Star Wars spin-off flick...*Solo* fires up on 4K Blu p94

The AF9 has been hailed (admittedly by Sony) as a landmark TV – as significant a development as the legendary Trinitron. **Steve May** isn't inclined to argue

Unveiled with much hullabaloo earlier this year, the Sony AF9 nonchalantly sets a staggeringly high benchmark for OLED picture quality. Boasting Kubrickian styling and a feature roster even the jaded will lust after, this TV is, quite frankly, an absolute stunner. It's also frighteningly expensive. The £3,000 ticket for the 55in model here is almost double that of some rivals.

The KD-55AF9 does at least look worthy of that premium price. It's stylish, and then some.

Viewed front on, the TV epitomises minimalism. There's barely a trim around the panel, and Sony's Bravia branding is almost an artful afterthought. Head around the back and it becomes a whole lot more exciting – the AF9 embraces the same lean-back look as its predecessor, the A1, but Sony has been tweaking. The kickback stand still houses electronics and connectivity, but the panel's actuators are now part of the futuristic design. There are also two side-firing woofers.

The ensemble is actually quite an impressive piece of engineering, released from the panel by a latch. If you choose not to unlatch, the screen can be wall-mounted, although it obviously won't sit flush to a surface.

A cosmetic cover hides all the mechanics from view. While the lean doesn't seem quite so pronounced as before, you'll still want to park it on low-level AV furniture.

Despite the meticulous design, it's disappointing to note that the TV comes with a bog-standard Sony remote control. It has dedicated Netflix and Google Play buttons, and is entirely usable, but it really doesn't reflect the premium nature of the AF9 itself.

All of the TV's four HDMI inputs support full-fat 4K/60fps sources and one offers eARC with Dolby Atmos passthrough. There's also an AV minijack input, digital optical audio output, Ethernet port and three USBs, one suitable for hard drive recording.

More unusually, there are dedicated loudspeaker binding posts, which allow the TV to function as a centre speaker in a surround sound setup.

Smarts get top marks. It's gratifying to see that Sony has finally upgraded its connected platform. Android 8 (also known as Oreo) is a significant improvement over the original TV OS. For once, Android wants to enhance the user experience rather than obstruct it. With a simplified user experience, it also seems a good deal faster than previous Android TV implementations.

Streaming services include Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and YouTube, all of which support 4K playback, with Netflix and Amazon offering HDR where available. There's still no support for Freeview Play, but Sony offers YouView instead, which includes a roll-back programme guide with integrated catch-up TV players, including BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4 and My5.

Breathtaking Bravia

When it comes to picture quality, the AF9 OLED has more snap than Thanos. The Triluminos panel is capable of breathtaking detail and colour definition. Unsurprisingly, its black level performance is nigh-on perfect, with outstanding near shadow

detail, although there is a caveat when it comes to image mode selection (more later).

Much of the panel's picture prowess likely stems from the object-based Super Resolution and HDR remastering tools of Sony's new X1 Ultimate processor. These isolate small details within the image in real time, and apply subtle enhancement, both in terms of brightness and colour saturation. Sony's Pixel Contrast Booster engine aims to maximise dynamic range. There's a lot of science going on behind the glass.

The AF9 offers an interesting take on HDR10, seemingly finding its own sweet spot when it comes to contrast and peak brightness. Image definition is superb, courtesy of Sony's tried-and-tested 4K X-Reality PRO engine.

I measured luminance peaks at just over 900 nits with a five per cent HDR window. This should be bright enough to handle most HDR-encoded content without a need to aggressively tone map.

A Custom image preset is a new take on Sony's original Cinema Pro mode. Carefully calibrated to match Sony's Pro OLED mastering monitor, the BVM-X300, it's ideally watched in a room with low ambient light, which may well describe your movie den. But if you want to watch sports material, for instance, the Standard mode is a punchier alternative. Animated fare or heavy visual effects movies are also worth a gander in Vivid mode, with its lush colour and razor-sharp detail.

Once the pariah of image >

AV INFO

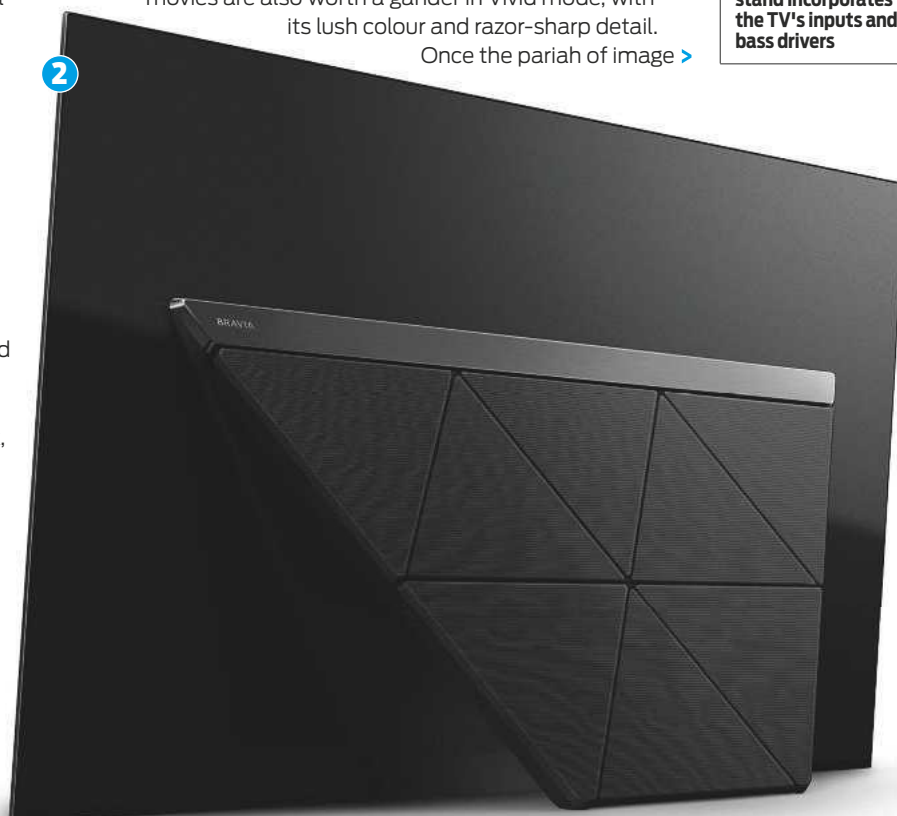
PRODUCT:
55in 4K HDR OLED
TV with Acoustic
Surface audio tech

POSITION:
Range-topping
Master Series OLED

PEERS:
Panasonic 55FZ952B;
LG OLED55C8

1. The AF9 OLED uses Sony's new X1 Ultimate processor

2. The rear-mounted stand incorporates the TV's inputs and bass drivers





SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; Dolby Vision **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; composite AV; Ethernet; optical digital audio output; 3 x USB ports **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 6 x 13W, plus 2 x 10W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,228(w) x 711(h) x 86(d)mm **WEIGHT (WITH STAND):** 30kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; Chromecast Built-in; Miracast; USB/network multimedia playback; eARC; Acoustic Surface Audio+; X1 Ultimate image processor; MotionFlow XR; Triluminos display; Netflix Calibrated mode

PARTNER WITH



NETFLIX: With Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos support (include e-ARC for the latter), the AF9 is a fine partner for Netflix's high-budget streaming shows. A UHD plan is £10 per month, and a 25Mbps internet connection is recommended.

3

presets, Vivid on a wide gamut panel like this is really fun. It's like eating a bucket of Skittles.

In addition to HDR10 and HLG, the AF9 is Dolby Vision compatible, from both its internal Netflix app and external sources, like a Blu-ray player or the latest-generation 4K Fire TV stick from Amazon.

However, there are black level issues with Dolby Vision content. The shadowy night sequences in *Luke Cage* (Netflix) suffer from viewed with the Dolby Vision Dark image setting; near black detail is crushed. The Dolby Vision Bright option proves far better, regardless of viewing

'When it comes to sonics, this Sony nails it – there's coherent panning around the screen, and plenty of bass'

conditions. This is also true of the opening space battle in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (Ultra HD Blu-ray). So don't be tempted by the Dark Side.

The set's Netflix Calibrated mode, which was given a big push when the TV was launched [see HCC #290], is another curiosity. It looks much like any other standard Cinema preset, and defeats Dolby Vision when selected. I struggled to find a reason to engage it.

Traditionally, Sony 4K screens offer excellent HD upscaling, and that's no different here. The set does a sterling job with regular hi-def sources, adding an almost HDR-like boost to the perennially dark sci-fi of *The 100* without over-lightening the rest of the frame. This image massaging is done so carefully, the treatment never looks overblown. And to really see the screen shine, watch SDR content with Peak Luminance set to High.

Motion handling, courtesy of MotionFlow XR, is also excellent. Artefacts are rarely an issue.

The set transpires to be a good display for gamers, not an area the brand has previously excelled in. There's still input lag on the everyday picture presets, but select Game mode and it drops to a respectable 27ms. Joypad junkies will find its performance doesn't compromise their trigger finger.

When it comes to sonics, this Sony nails it. The retooled '+' version of Acoustic Surface Audio technology works really well. Now with three stereo panel actuators, there's coherent panning around the screen, and the dual woofers on the rear provide just the right amount of oomph.

The ability to effectively transform the Acoustic Surface Audio+ system into a centre speaker is also an intriguing option for smaller home cinemas. After all, not every viewing room can easily accommodate a traditional centre channel enclosure. In such circumstances the classic solution would be to run your home theatre system with a phantom centre, but employing the TV is a neat alternative.

The *Tomb Raider* reboot (Blu-ray) features a frenetic Atmos soundtrack, with plenty of movement and detail across the front soundstage, particularly when Alicia Vikander's boat is battered on the high seas. The AF9, used as a centre speaker, keeps up with my left/right towers. Dialogue is clear and locked to centre, and the watery bedlam of the scene helps disguise timbre differences.

When all the individual amplifier models driving the actuators are summed together, output is quoted at around 100W. Drive it too hard and the actuators shut down to prevent distortion.

Effortless style

Let's face it, the AF9 isn't chump change. But it delivers on so many levels, from sound and vision to cosmetic design, that it's easy to recommend to enthusiasts.

A competitor is the Panasonic FZ952, which has comparable picture quality, arguably eclipsing the Sony in terms of colour accuracy and nuance, and impressive audio in the shape of its Dynamic Blade speaker. But that OLED doesn't have the Sony's effortless style and Dolby Vision/Atmos support. If those things are important to you, then it's probably a good time to splash the cash ■

3. The stand causes the TV to lean back, so install it on low-level furniture if possible

HCC VERDICT



Sony KD-55AF9

→ £3,000 → www.sony.co.uk

WE SAY: Sony's Master Series OLED hero is a *tour de force* in UHD TV design, boasting awesome images, outstanding sound and a great new Android smart platform.

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Pretty in pink?

The latest Now TV media streamer is 4K-capable but remains bargain-priced. Is that cause for celebration? Kinda, shrugs **Steve May**

SPECIFICATIONS

CONNECTIONS: 1 x HDMI output; microSD slot; Ethernet **KEY APPS:** Netflix; YouTube; BBC iPlayer; ITV Play; My5; All4; UKTV Play; Sky News **AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:** PCM stereo; Dolby Digital Plus; DTS **VIDEO FORMAT SUPPORT:** MPEG; HEVC; VP9 **DIMENSIONS:** 21(h) x 125(w) x 125(d) mm **WEIGHT:** 222g

FEATURES: Physical remote control; voice search; live pause function; integrated dual-band Wi-Fi; Sky Cinema, Sky Sports, Sky Entertainment, Sky Kids subscription passes available

Netflix is now part of the Now TV VOD roster

4K YouTube, both 30fps and 60fps, is extremely impressive, although the content is mainly travelogues.

During setup, the box auto detects your display. If the panel supports 4K HDR at 60Hz, that's what it outputs from services with content that supports it, like Netflix.

HD will be upscaled to 4K resolution, and the results aren't shoddy. *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (Sky Cinema, HD), delivers a crisp image, particularly when there's not too much going on in the frame. A little movement though, and the detail softens.

You can limit the output to 720 and 1080p, or manually select 4K at 30Hz, 4K at 60Hz, 4K HDR at 30Hz and 4K HDR at 60Hz. There's no option to select an automatic native frame rate, so movies that would be 24p on Blu-ray play at 30Hz or 60Hz.

The audio story is similarly mixed. Now TV supports both Dolby Digital+ and DTS, in addition to regular stereo. Netflix content streams in 5.1, and sounds extremely fine. Sky channels, however, doggedly stick to PCM stereo – even with movies. This lack of surround limits the appeal of a Sky Cinema pass to home cinema fans. Of course it's not a deal-breaker if you merely intend to run the box straight into a TV.

Untapped resource

This shiny new Roku-powered Now TV streamer is a decent bit of kit, but we have issues with Sky's content provision. The lack of 5.1 is a killer from an AV viewpoint; Netflix in 4K HDR with 5.1 is the only saving grace. The key reason to buy is access to Sky's content. What a shame, then, that its sound and vision doesn't exploit the hardware ■

HCC VERDICT



Now TV Smart Box with 4K
→ £46 → www.nowtv.com

WE SAY: Powerful Roku hardware makes for a great user experience, but Now TV's 720p stereo content delivery doesn't do it justice.



PINK AND BLACK. It's a bold look, but this new Now TV box just about pulls it off. At the very least, you're unlikely to lose the dramatically coloured Wi-Fi remote when the lights dim.

Small and easy to accommodate, this Roku-made streamer resembles a glossy, oversized coaster. The first 4K-enabled Now TV media player, connections include a single HDMI, microSD card slot for expansion and Ethernet. Dual-band Wi-Fi is provided for those who want to go cable-free.

Now TV, if you're not up to speed, is designed for those keen to access Sky's premium content without signing up to a lengthy contract or installing a dish. Instead,

you buy what you need à la carte, with monthly vouchers. The Sky Cinema Pass is £9.99, Entertainment is £7.99, Kids is £3.99 and Sky Sports is £33.99 (or £7.99 for a day or £12.99 for a week). Also onboard is Netflix, plus assorted catch-up apps,

including BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4 and My5, as well as YouTube, Sky Store, UKTV Play and Vevo.

As we've seen on previous Roku devices, setup is slick and easy. It only takes a few minutes. The user interface is clear, and navigation sprightly. Thumbnail rails allow you to scour apps, movies and live IP-delivered Sky channels. The supplied remote integrates a voice search tool.

720p lives on

The provision of 4K could be enough to tempt those who haven't signed up to an alternate 4K content supplier, and the box's multichannel audio (to 7.1) passthrough is a solid tech spec, but there's some devil in the detail. If you're expecting to see Sky content in 4K, be it sports, movies or *Game of Thrones*, you'll be disappointed. This media player may be UHD ready, but Sky's Now TV infrastructure isn't. The service still streams at 720p, although the box itself obfuscates by adding its own upscale, depending on your selected output resolution.

On the plus side, Netflix plays in 4K HDR and the provision of the VP9 codec means YouTube material can stream at 2160p too.

Image quality is on par with other 4K-enabled devices and looks very good.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K streaming media player

POSITION:
Premium position as the first 4K-enabled Now TV box

PEERS:
Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K; Google Chromecast

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Syn of the times

Martin Pipe reckons that Synology's DS119j budget NAS could revolutionise your viewing habits – but you'll need to add your own HDD

WE ARE GETTING used to the idea of cloud storage thanks to online services like Google Drive, Dropbox and iCloud. Accessing your data from anywhere, on any device, is attractive. But cloud storage services tend to offer limited amounts of capacity – they're fine for documents and photos, but not really suitable for video and music collections. A NAS (Network Attached Storage) box might be more useful. Basically, this is a hard drive with a network connection and a small computer to keep everything organised and ticking over.

You can upload files to a NAS from PCs and other devices. Once there, they can be accessed by your networked devices – your own private cloud, in other words.

Budget NAS boxes are now cheap; the home-use DS119j from Synology can be yours for £95. On top of this, though, you'll need to buy a SATA 3.5in hard drive to fit inside the unit – this isn't a plug-n-play solution.

The DS119j will accommodate only one drive (pricier units have several bays, so your precious data can be mirrored or spanned across multiple drives, ensuring that nothing is lost if one fails).

Hard drives aren't ruinously expensive though – the Seagate IronWolf unit I'm using is 4TB and £110 – and are a doddle to install in the DS119j. Having a drive-less NAS gives you scope to choose the size that meets your requirements.

The DS119j, as with other NAS devices,

includes DLNA server software that enables files to be chosen for playback by devices like BD players, consoles and smart TVs. PCs can, of course, also act as DLNA servers, but only for as long as they are powered up. A dedicated NAS is a better alternative – the DS119j consumes

considerably less power than a PC, meaning that you can leave it running 24/7.

Synology's Media Server worked well with all the devices I tried. It runs on the firm's proprietary DSM operating system. One of the advantages of DSM is that users can customise their boxes to specific requirements by downloading, installing and running Synology or third-party packages that provide the desired functionality.

Most of those available for DSM are free. They include a search tool; Drive (a program that provides remote access to your files); virus scanner; backup manager, file management; Surveillance Station program that works with IP security cameras; and even a BitTorrent client. On top of this are programs that Synology has provided for organising and playing files via a web browser.



SPECIFICATIONS

PROCESSOR: 800MHz Marvell A3720 dual-core processor **DRIVE BAYS:** One for 3.5in drive (not included) – 4TB maximum capacity **CONNECTIONS:** Gigabit Ethernet; 2 x USB 2.0 **DIMENSIONS:** 71(w) x 166(h) x 224(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 0.7kg (without HDDs)

FEATURES: Synology Web Assistant and EZ-Internet Wizards for installation; Synology DSM (DiskStation Manager) operating system; VideoStation/AudioStation/PhotoStation (multimedia organisers/players); CloudStation; DownloadStation; DLNA-certified media server; power consumption 5W idle (10W when HDD active); maximum transfer speed 112MB/s (read)/108MB/s (write)

The DS119j claims an idle power consumption of 5W

But there's more. When you're taken through Synology's step-by-step installation process, you choose a name and a password. You're then given a URL, and from there your DS119j (and your photo, video and music content) can be accessed from any web browser anywhere in the world. And there are equivalent playback programs in iOS/Android app form.

With an Android device, I could, for example, choose a movie. A streaming URL is then sent to the relevant app (VLC is a good choice) and playing starts. If network conditions are less than ideal, you may get streaming glitches – especially if the content is HD. I also had to reset my router configuration (twice) to get my DS119j linking properly with the outside world. Another limitation is that DSM here can be rather unresponsive, giving me the impression that the DS119j's hardware isn't quite fast enough.

However, over time this seemed to improve – possibly because all software updates had been installed, or the indexing of media files had completed. Accessing movies and music on my smartphone (using Wi-Fi wherever possible) in remote locations became more reliable.

Flexible friend

Synology's OS is versatile and potent, and the DS119j is a smart-looking bit of kit. Entry-level buyers after a single-bay NAS might want a unit with in-built HDD, but choosing your own (up to 4TB) adds a level of flexibility. A few niggles, but otherwise impressive ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Entry-level
single-bay
consumer NAS

POSITION:
Above the DS115j

PEERS:
WD My Cloud;
Buffalo LinkStation
LS220D;
QNAP TS-128A

HCC VERDICT



Synology DS119j

→ £95 (no drives) → www.synology.com

WE SAY: Limitations there are, but like pricier models the DS119j runs Synology's potent DSM OS and is an excellent DLNA server.

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A bulletproof app and restyled speakers put Yamaha's MusicCast platform in **Mark Craven's** good books

Once more, with feeling

Yamaha MusicCast remains an obvious multiroom audio solution for home cinema fans. Its product range is extensive (and revamped and expanded for 2018), and includes AV receivers, processors, soundbars, subwoofers, streamers and – naturally – standalone speakers. The latter are where it goes toe-to-toe with the likes of Sonos.

The MusicCast 50 and MusicCast 20 tested here are the new additions to its wireless speaker lineup, and are welcome. Previous models such as the wall-mountable ISX-80 offered design innovation, but didn't quite feel up to the task of challenging the multiroom competition. With the arrival of the MusicCast 50 in particular, the platform now has the traditionally styled, room-filling speaker it always should have.

This £450 unit offers a stereo driver array, with 4in woofers joined by 1.1in soft dome tweeters. These sit in a front-firing configuration, despite the speaker's oval shape and semi-wraparound grille perhaps suggesting a 360-degree approach. Each channel gets a 35W amplifier.

The design is safe and unflashy. The speaker's top plate is uncluttered apart from soft-touch controls around the edge. One bank offers status lights for the source/wireless settings, the other features volume controls and preset keys. On the back panel are 3.5mm and phono audio inputs, a digital optical audio port and Ethernet socket.

Also auditioned is the MusicCast 20, a smaller £200 model with a single (3.5in) woofer and tweeter, backed up by dual passive radiators. While this would be a natural fit for uncritical listening in a bedroom or den, two of them can be paired for stereo listening, or used as wireless surrounds in a home cinema setup with compatible Yamaha gear (2018 AVRs and the BAR 400 and BAR 40 soundbars).

Style-wise, the MusicCast 20 is a clear relation to the MusicCast 50 with its curved chassis, although the top-plate itself hides controls, and there are no physical inputs beyond Ethernet.

Operational simplicity

The speakers replaced a Dynaudio Music 3 in my setup, providing a useful comparison. The pricier Dynaudio sounded better than both, as expected, but Yamaha's MusicCast app and general all-round operational

simplicity made the niggles of Dynaudio's software more niggly than ever.

Setting up a MusicCast speaker still isn't plug-n-play, but is fairly straightforward. To get going, hit the Connect button on the speaker's rim, and then log onto the MusicCast Wi-Fi network on your smart device. This will ask you to connect to your own Wi-Fi, which, if you're like me, involves a hunt for the password. With this done, you can then assign the speaker to a room, give it an image, and establish multiroom links with others. From here on, control is via the app or the speaker's on-body controls. There's no remote. At times I missed having one, but it does mean you don't have to find a place for it when not using it.

Yamaha deserves a pat on the back for its app. The design is tidy, if a little unglamorous in terms of text/colour scheme, and it's quick to navigate. Integrated services include Spotify, Deezer, Tidal, Qobuz and Napster, plus a 'net radio portal (with a 'Popular Stations' menu >

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Wireless multiroom speakers

POSITION: Newest additions to MusicCast, joining AVRs, soundbars, a sub and more

PEERS: HEOS by Denon; Sonos Play series; Dynaudio Music

1. The speaker's optical input means TV hookup is possible

2. The MusicCast 50 splits its drivers into L/R channels, each given 65W of juice

2





that is presumably Europe-wide or just oddly curated). There are also AirPlay and Bluetooth options, plus server, aux, digital and 'This Phone' tabs. The layout can be customized so unused sources are shoved out of sight. A great trick of MusicCast is that it signals the format of the streamed content – so those with Deezer Hi-Fi, for instance, will know if a track is available in lossless FLAC.

During audition, the app didn't quit or freeze once, and delivered a firmware update with ease. An odd quirk, though, is that it's not possible to skip forward or rewind through a track, despite a bar showing the time currently elapsed. You'll fruitlessly tap this with your finger.

A step in the right direction

Compared to the last Yamaha standalone units I heard, the MusicCast 50 feels a bit like a larger-scale iteration of the WX-030, and moves beyond the somewhat cold and unorganized delivery of the ISX-80. There's noticeable bass presence, which segues into clean, warm mid-tones and reasonably crisp trebles. As alluded to, it isn't a match for Dynaudio's Music 3, which sparkles with greater clarity, dynamic drive and low-end impact. But the performance of this £450 desktop stereo unit still impresses.

Playing tracks via Deezer Hi-Fi finds the MusicCast 50 in good voice with guitar-driven rock and fizzy pop. There's a pleasing depth to its delivery that works well with the funk-fuelled rhythm section of Aerosmith's *Walk This Way*, or the relentless drive of Royal Blood's *Figure It Out*. In fact, it can sound a little over-egged; then you discover that the Bass Boost sound preset is on by default in the app. Far better to switch to Standard, and then use the sliders of High, Mid and Low to tune its performance to your taste.

Although a stereo design, the MusicCast 50 doesn't create much soundstage width to hammer home two-channel effects. The delicate L/R production of, say, Muse's *Madness* is largely lost.

More impressive is its uncoloured balance through the frequency range. There's a sense that extreme low-end presence and treble details are AWOL, but there's a solid grip on what's there in between. The 2011 remaster of Pink Floyd's *Time* begins with clocks ringing cleanly, followed by

SPECIFICATIONS

MusicCast 50

DRIVERS: 2 x 4in woofers; 2 x 1.1in tweeters **AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):** 2 x 35W **CONNECTIONS:** Digital optical audio; 3.5mm; stereo analogue phono; Ethernet **AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:** FLAC, WAV and AIFF (192kHz/24-bit); ALAC (96kHz/24-bit); MP3; WMA **DIMENSIONS:** 400(w) x 123(h) x 200(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4.5kg

MusicCast 20

DRIVERS: 1 x 3.5in woofer; 1 x 1.1in tweeter; 2 x passive radiators **AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):** 40W **CONNECTIONS:** Ethernet **AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:** FLAC, WAV and AIFF (192kHz/24-bit); ALAC (96kHz/24-bit); MP3; WMA **DIMENSIONS:** 150(w) x 186(h) x 130(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.2kg

FEATURES: Dual-band Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; Alarm/Snooze/Sleep function; AirPlay; MusicCast Surround; MusicCast app includes Tidal, Spotify, Deezer; Amazon Alexa support; network streaming; preset customisation; BassBoost

PARTNER WITH



MUSICCAST BAR 400:

Yamaha's 2018 soundbar (£600) offers DTS Virtual: X processing, a wireless subwoofer, and HDMI connectivity with 4K HDR passthrough. Add two MusicCast 20 speakers to enjoy discrete 5.1 audio.

echoing percussion and synth effects. Vocals and guitar then kick in with good separation; the ensuing solo sounds pure enough to make you want to mime along.

The MusicCast 20 offers the same overall approach, albeit monophonic and with a reduction in scale. It's not the sort of speaker you'd set aside time to sit down and listen to, but is more than adequate for everyday multiroom use. It's also easy to imagine a pairing filling out the surround channels of a living room AV system with wireless charm; and this would surely be a better, more immersive option than using a single MusicCast 50, which is an alternate Yamaha suggestion.

Rock-solid

Both the MusicCast 50 and MusicCast 20 broaden the appeal of the platform, as new models should. Their styling feels better judged than previous Yamaha speakers, as does their performance. The larger unit is well-equipped for permanent installation in a media den, while its baby brother offers a lot for its price tag. And key to the attraction of both is the rock-solid nature of the MusicCast app and its healthy roster of integrated services ■

3. Both Yamaha's MusicCast 20 and 50 are available in black and white finishes

HCC VERDICT



Yamaha MusicCast 50

→ £450 → uk.yamaha.com

WE SAY: Slick operation and smart styling give this punchy wireless stereo speaker a leg up, although a bit more dynamism would be welcome. Physical connections add flexibility.

HCC VERDICT



Yamaha MusicCast 20

→ £200 → uk.yamaha.com

WE SAY: An obvious multiroom partner to the MusicCast 50 that's smaller in stature and sonic scale but also in price. An intriguing alternative to wired rears with a Yamaha AVR.

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Natural selection

Martin Pipe familiarises himself with the latest version of Nero's long-established software suite. What's changed since the '2018' release?

NERO, FROM GERMAN

company Ahead, is something of a software institution. Available for Microsoft Windows PCs in one form or another, it started off as a tool for burning (hence the allusion to Rome's infamous emperor) data or music onto CD-R and CD-RW media. It then grew with new features, and is now a fully-blown 'suite' able to deal with audio, video (anything from SD to 4K), photos, networked or USB content, and the internet. Like that very first version, Nero can also burn discs – DVD and Blu-ray, as well as CD.

We're now into Nero 2019, which is available in two versions – the £60 Standard and (as tested) Platinum version for £80. Standard gives you several core packages. These are Video (non-linear editing), MediaHome (a multimedia player and DLNA server), Recode (transcoding video from one format to another) and Burning ROM (making your own discs). Platinum adds to this handy repertoire BackItUp (protecting your important data) and MusicRecorder (search-based capturing of audio from 'net radio stations, and playing/organising your music). All of these elements are available individually. There are mobile apps too – among these the DLNA-compliant Nero Receiver, which allows MediaHome to stream to your tablet or smartphone.

So far, so good. However, much of this stuff – which you can access from a clear and logical launch screen – was found in last year's Nero 2018.

Help at hand

There are new features, though, starting with the new launcher that improves workflow – not least because there's now an interactive help

system, complete with tutorial videos. MediaHome, meanwhile, allows you to organize and play media stored on OneDrive. And I'm pleased to note that in an increasingly online world, Nero hasn't forgotten physical media. To this end, video can now be transcoded to disc formats – fully-compatible profiles for DVD and Blu-ray.

The Platinum version is also endowed with the newly minted ability to consolidate data and media from mobile devices, hard drives and cloud storage into a single area courtesy of something called DriveSpan. There are also video editing features like Nero LifeThemes, which automatically creates movies and slideshows from your media; cloud-backup (OneDrive and Google Drive); a duplicate-image tracker; and full support for advanced codecs like HEVC. It's all a lot of fun – and there's much of value here. The video editing software, for example, is powerful and can give polished results, even with smartphone footage you accidentally shot in portrait...

Nero's multimedia player proved to be compatible with anything I could throw at it,

SPECIFICATIONS

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Windows 7 SP1; 2GHz processor (64-bit for editing UHD video); 1GB RAM; 5GB hard disk space; DirectX graphics card; DVD drive for installation

SUPPORTED CODECS: MP3, FLAC, AAC, WAV, APE, OGG (audio); MPEG, FLV, MP4, 3GP, H.264, H.265 (video)

FEATURES: Media organiser; import, edit and play SD/HD/4K content; DLNA media server; burn to CD/DVD/Blu-ray with profiles; cover art/Gracenote; rip CDs and non-copyrighted DVDs; video editor with disc export; archive/back-up data; cloud support



Platinum bundles six software packages

and media files could be accessed with my DLNA-compatible players. Some items were, however, wrongly categorised (video mistaken for

audio), causing access problems.

Scoring highly is the comprehensive Recode, which gives you a fair degree of control over encoding parameters (including Dolby Digital passthrough) and will convert off-air HDTV recordings into MKV or MP4 HD files. But although you can trim the beginning and end of the source file, you can only remove complete sections like ad breaks if you take it into the editor – which lacks all of Recode's output options (e.g., MKV).

With the highest-quality settings, a 105-minute Full HD satellite TV recording took three hours to convert into 1080p MKV using a powerful i7 Windows PC. But the results were worth the wait – clean video, with perfectly synchronised sound.

Other software elements, some of which have to be installed (and may only be trial versions), are worth mentioning. TuneItUp provides a number of tools to improve the performance of your PC (or smart device), while the RescueAgent examines storage media for accidentally deleted files.

Considering just how much is on offer, it's amazing that Nero is as navigable and user-friendly as it is (the new Start feature helps). A clumsy collection of freeware will achieve most of what it provides, but it's great to have everything in one place ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Comprehensive multimedia suite for Windows PCs

POSITION:

Top-of-the-range Platinum version

PEERS:

Freeware tools; Roxio Creator

HCC VERDICT



Nero Platinum 2019

→ £80 → www.nero.com

WE SAY: A few bugs and idiosyncrasies – hardly surprising, given its sheer scale – but Nero is on the whole very useful and pretty slick.

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OLED for all!

LG has released a 4K HDR OLED TV for the masses –

John Archer discovers if a less-powerful processor leads to a less impressive picture performance



FOR THE PAST few years, LG has pursued a policy of giving every OLED TV series in any given year's range more or less the same picture quality. For 2018, though, it's trying something different. Its entry-level B8 TVs use a less powerful processor than C8, E8 and W8 siblings, enabling it to sell this 55in set for £1,500 – versus £2,000 for the step-up 55C8.

This £500 saving could make the OLED55B8 a genuine game-changer. Provided its cost-saving measures haven't seriously impacted its performance.

The TV doesn't look cheap. It boasts OLED's extreme slimness around its top edges, and its 'single layer' front is gorgeous. The set widens towards its bottom edge to accommodate speakers, tuners and processors, but it still looks ridiculously opulent for a mid-price model. There are two OLED55B8 design iterations. The B8PLA I'm

auditioning is sold at Currys, and uses an angled-down, neckless metal-plate stand. The more widely available B8SLC option uses a small neck attached to a boomerang-style stand.

Tuner inputs for both Freeview HD and Freesat HD join

the TV's quartet of HDMI (all v2.0) and trio of USB ports.

Use Ethernet or Wi-Fi to sample the set's network features, accessed through LG's slick, attractive and straightforward webOS platform. Streaming video services support 4K and HDR where available. Smart features engage nicely with LG's new voice recognition system, too.

B for B grade?

The OLED55B8's pictures, it turns out, aren't as good as those of the C8 series. But they're still exceptional for a £1,500 TV.

The star of the show, as usual with OLED, is black level. There's no hint of general greyness, and bright objects that stand out against darkness appear without seemingly a pixel of light 'leakage'.

What's more, the intensity of such stand-out HDR image elements is phenomenal since, unlike LCD technology, there's no need for the OLED55B8 to dim bright highlights to preserve black level uniformity.

Colours look rich and pure, but also balanced and natural. There's a decent amount of tonal subtlety on show in gorgeously lush *Darkest Hour* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) sequences such as those in Buckingham Palace. But there's also more consistency than LCD TVs can muster with trickily-lit environments such as Churchill's war committee meetings.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes, HDR10; Dolby Vision; HLG **TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD; Freesat HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USBs; Ethernet **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 40W (2.2 configuration) **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,228(w) x 707(h) x 47(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 16.3kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; Alpha 7 processor; ThinQ AI smart system; voice control; webOS smart system, Dolby Atmos sound decoding; Bluetooth

Note the B8 is available with two stand options

The OLED55B8 handles standard dynamic range content beautifully too, and video gamers will love that it only takes around 20ms to render its pictures.

So where do the B8's pictures fall short of the C8? It's not as good at upscaling sub-4K sources, for starters. Results look softer and less detailed. Its motion handling is marginally less natural too, and its colour handling isn't as precise or consistent.

Finally, very dark areas can look slightly noisier on the B8, and its pictures aren't as bright. A measured figure of 680 nits on a 10 per cent white HDR window is a substantial 120 nits or so down from the C8 range. This is arguably the single most compelling reason to find that £500 more. Punchier OLED displays have hit the market this year, and the B8 feels like a bit of a step back.

The TV's audio is unexpectedly good. The mid-range is open, dynamic and clean, and the soundstage is detailed and spreads way beyond the screen, both vertically and horizontally, particularly if you're playing something that takes advantage of the B8's integrated Dolby Atmos decoding.

The only catch is that the sound tends to compress rather than swell when meaty action scenes kick in.

Hard to resist

The OLED55B8 is a great – and arguably overdue – idea by LG, introducing its premium display technology to a wider audience. Yes, there are reasons to spend £500 more on the C8 55-incher, but any TV that still delivers as many of OLED's picture strengths while costing so little (relatively speaking...) is hard to resist ■

HCC VERDICT



LG OLED55B8

→ £1,500 → www.lg.com/uk

WE SAY: Although not as good as LG's step-up range, the B8 remains a fantastic way for more people to embrace the joys of 4K OLED.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
55in 4K HDR
OLED TV

POSITION:
LG's entry-level
OLED TV for 2018

PEERS:
LG OLED55C8;
Samsung 55Q8DN;
Sony 55XF9005

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Digital Copy

While **Mark Craven** appreciates the technological justification for jumbo-sized 8K TVs, he's pretty certain 85in displays aren't ready for average UK living rooms. But projectors are...

I'VE GOT OUT the tape measure, jiggled the sofas about and come to a conclusion – there's no way I can squeeze Samsung's 85in 8K TV into my house. Of course this isn't a major problem, as I can't afford the damn thing anyway.

As my colleagues Steve May and John Archer explain elsewhere in this issue, 8K TVs are born to be big, and the increase in size doesn't equate to a lengthening of viewing distance. We sat away from standard-def TVs so as not to have our enjoyment blighted by obvious panel architecture and blocktastic visuals. With 8K you can get close. And you should if you want to get the most benefit.

Agreed viewing distance standards are about as rare as a good Adam Sandler film these days, but the main argument

is that you can replace a 55in-65in 4K set with a 75in-85in 8K model and not need to change where you sit. But in my house that simply wouldn't work.

A 360-degree scan of my lounge finds no place to realistically plonk an 85in TV. Of the four walls, one has too many windows, another a fireplace, and the other two have doors. I could perhaps use one of the latter, but would need to remove a load of shelving and sit atop the mantelpiece opposite.

Forgive me if this sounds blindingly obvious, but an 85in TV isn't really a consumer proposition unless you have a sparsely furnished mega-sized snug or a dedicated home cinema room. You won't find either of those in most UK homes, not even new-builds where you'd think architects might have cottoned on to the fact that the gogglebox is no longer a 24in CRT.

All this means I take any talk of an 8K revolution with a pinch of salt. Sure, as the 8K wagon rolls and more brands come to market, prices will no doubt drop. A larger consumer base than that in a position

to grab Samsung's Q900R might start thinking about a resolution upgrade. But finding a place to put a 33-megapixel behemoth is another matter.

We're more likely to witness an avalanche of 55in-65in 8K sets, eventually with cut-throat pricing, and scientific discussions of field-of-view and pixel-pitch being tossed out of the window.

Make mine a large

Monster TVs in general have always intrigued me, as they blur the line between what we think of as TV and projection. When I first became interested in AV, there was a clearer division between the two, with the latter considered the only option for a *bona fide* home cinema by many (an opinion still held by some).

An 85in TV upsets the apple cart somewhat, as it offers the bigscreen benefits of a PJ and screen (to an extent) without the more complex setup. No longer is line of sight between beamer and canvas an issue, and light-level management less of a concern.

That said, a projector system actually remains the common sense approach for anyone facing an uphill struggle fitting a beastly LCD or OLED panel into their room. Pull-up and drop-down screens are easier to accommodate than a gigantic sheet of glass. You can have a 100in display one minute, and nothing there the next. Even more amenable are ultra-short throw models like Epson's LS100 (pictured) that can be sited close to the wall, meaning you don't risk dazzled eyes if you happen to look back when you get up to go the toilet.

Is it possible that the growing interest in bigscreen TVs will have a knock-on effect, and see PJs treated with the love they've always deserved? Now that would be a revolution ■

*Could you accommodate an 85in TV in your house?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

If **Mark Craven** really wanted to sit on his mantelpiece, he'd have to find a new place to store all his AV remote controls





Film Fanatic

We're over a decade into the life of Blu-ray now and **Anton van Beek** is more than a little annoyed he still can't complete his Martin Scorsese and Walt Disney collections...

POP QUIZ, EVERYONE! What do G.W. Pabst's 1929 silent masterpiece *Pandora's Box*, Howard Hawks' celebrated 1938 screwball comedy *Bringing Up Baby*, Charles Walters' 1956 all-star musical *High Society*, Alan J. Pakula's award-winning 1971 crime film *Klute* (pictured), Walt Disney's 1985 animated fantasy *The Black Cauldron*, James Cameron's 1994 action blockbuster *True Lies* and David Fincher's 2002 thriller *Panic Room* all have in common?

The answer, of course, is that none of them have been released on Blu-ray to date. And I don't mean they haven't been released in the UK. I mean that no matter how hard you look, you won't find a Blu-ray release of *Bringing Up Baby* or *True Lies* anywhere else in the world. And that list above is just the tip of a large and often surprising iceberg.

With some films there would appear to be a clear-cut reason why we're still waiting for a Blu-ray. In the case of James Cameron's *The Abyss* and *True Lies*, it's surely because the filmmaker is too busy making *Avatar* sequels that nobody asked for to oversee and sign off the new remasters he has been hinting at for years. **And when it comes to the vast majority of Russ Meyer's body of work, it's no secret that the rights holder has made it almost impossible for anybody to license them**, while also showing little interest in doing anything with itself (*Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* is the only one it has put out on BD to date).

But there are many, many more movies still awaiting a hi-def release where that isn't the case. Where, for example, is the Blu-ray equivalent to *The Marx Brothers Collection* DVD boxset that Warner Bros. put out in 2004, containing the likes of *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races*? And why, when so many other classic Cary Grant

comedies have been turning up on Blu-ray, are we still waiting for *Bringing Up Baby*, perhaps the best-loved of them all?

And how on earth we can still be waiting for Martin Scorsese's *After Hours* and *Bringing Out the Dead*, David Cronenberg's *Crash* and Danny Boyle's *The Beach* to go Blu?

On the flip side, a US *Panic Room* Blu-ray was announced for release in September alongside a 4K disc, only for both to be yanked from the schedules fairly late in the day. Given how far along production must have been by that point, both will surely be resolicited in the near future. Meanwhile, with a new 2K DCP of the 2009 restoration of *Pandora's Box* touring UK cinemas this year, it gives me hope that a Blu-ray release can't be too far off.

Niche audiences

Still, even if those two titles do get released, it's a tiny splash in an ocean of films that remain MIA on Blu-ray. I realise there's no way that every (surviving) film ever made could – or even should – be given a hi-def outing. But the ones I've discussed here are hardly obscure movies that only cater to a niche audience.

Maybe it would be better if they did fit that designation? After all, it feels like there's more chance of an obscure 1970s Italian horror (take your pick which one, it doesn't really matter) getting a Blu-ray release in the next 12 months than the 1953 sci-fi smash *The War of the Worlds*. And regardless whether you'd rather watch a foreign-language fright flick or an H.G. Wells adaptation, I think we can all agree it's a completely baffling state of affairs ■

Which films are you still waiting to see released on Blu-ray? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Anton van Beek dreams of a day when *The Keep* is on Blu-ray and he no longer has to make do with an artefact-strewn Film4 recording.



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In The Mix

Film grain and digital noise can counter the 4K sheen that system owners seek. **Jon Thompson** reveals the number-crunching management techniques that make images look their best

FILM GRAIN IS a regular home cinema debate topic. This was brought back to the fore by the release on 4K UHD of 1980s classic *Predator*, given a 4K polish in part to promote the 2018 reboot flick.

So what is film grain? For a start, you can't actually see it, even at the start of the 4K *Predator* Blu-ray. The grain is too small to see unless you have an electron microscope, so what you are seeing is a clumping effect of all the film crystals producing a Stochastic pattern. It appears random but in fact isn't. If you are a quantum physics fan you will discover nothing is truly random; what's required is enough data points to be able to see the pattern. Now we have computing power to do that...

Grain management is a term that has been thrown around for years. Many people claim to have developed this technology, and Kodak did spend a lot of time laying the foundations. But really the one and true pioneer was John D. Lowry at Lowry Digital, who became famous for his work at NASA restoring footage of the Apollo missions. His own mission was to reduce 'visual noise in motion pictures.'

I got to know his company well over the years and was involved when entertainment corp Reliance bought it in 2008. I recommended Lowry Digital as a world-leading image outfit based on the respect John and his team had earned from many leading filmmakers, including George Lucas, James Cameron and David Fincher. Lowry was really the first person to demonstrate grain management that didn't affect the picture in a negative way. He showed that you could analyze the Stochastic pattern, inverse it and remove it. Once removed, you can process RAW images, and then replace a level of grain for aesthetic reasons – as a true RAW image does look very plasticky.

Issues with grain are varied, but the main one is that film stock is designed to be printed to film. This

process actually reduces grain as the two Stochastic patterns will sort of cancel each other out, resulting in minimal visual noise. Today we scan film digitally, and this locks in the Stochastic pattern, as it's not going to get cancelled in any future copying process.

Some film restorers believe it is criminal to mess with the grain as it's part of the movie. That's correct, but – and it's a big but – you are not seeing what the filmmakers intended when they made the film, as they went through a photochemical process. In the digital world you are going to have to manipulate the image to recreate the photochemical presentation.

Take any of the titles that have gone through the Lowry process. *Lady and the Tramp*, for example, looks so beautiful it now matches what the original cels looked like. I know, I've seen them.

Flipping the coin and talking about management of digital noise using the Lowry process, it can show similar properties to film grain but appear more random. To solve this you need a bigger data set to analyse. Take a look at *Zodiac* (above), *Benjamin Button* and *Avatar* – every frame is post-processed by the Lowry system. They look natural and have a ping to them that was lost in noise before!

None of this is done on a laptop or a desktop, it's a serious render farm. Each frame can take a few hours to process and the larger the data set the longer it takes. We did a 30-second test from 16mm film, pushing it to the max – it took three days to render at 4K. The results were stunning.

Going back: does the grain of the 4K *Predator* disc match the 35mm show print? It's not as consistent, but it's very close. If you want to see what back-catalogue 4K is all about, it's worth a look ■

*Does film grain bother you?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at @johnnyfocal



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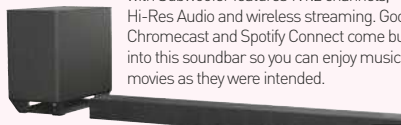
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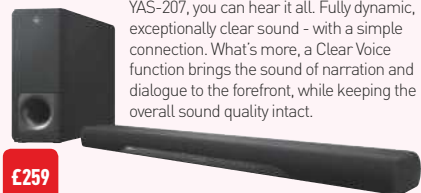


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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

No *Orville* BD? That's quackers

I managed to miss the inaugural season of *The Orville* on Fox HD due to work commitments but was happy to pick up Seth MacFarlane's homage to *Star Trek* on its release to disc. So it came with great surprise that Twentieth Century Fox has decided in its wisdom to release it only on prehistoric DVD format in the UK.

Why, when it was shot in HD, did we not get it on Blu-ray? I understand there being no 4K release but not offering it on Blu-ray makes me wonder why home cinema fans would want to invest in their setups if major studios can't offer you HD on at least new material. I am loathe to buy the DVD for this and will wait in the hope of a future release on a more appropriate higher-definition format that will give more pleasurable viewing.

Any thoughts?

Gurpreet Bhatia

Anton van Beek replies: Having written a Film Fanatic column about this very subject in the dim and distant past (well, *HCC* #284), believe me when I say I feel your pain.

While it would seem that our views on the actual quality of Seth MacFarlane's latest TV



Sci-fi parody
The Orville is a
DVD-only release

outing may be diametrically opposed, I too was surprised by the decision not to release the show on Blu-ray.

Then I remembered that this is Twentieth Century Fox we're talking about, a studio that has pretty much bailed on releasing its TV shows on Blu-ray. Only a handful of series (such as big-hitters *Homeland* and *American Horror Story*) have somehow

slipped through the cracks and continue to see new seasons released on HD disc year-in, year-out.

As such, the best you can realistically hope for is that the first season performs strongly enough on DVD to persuade Fox there's a big enough audience to make Blu-ray releases of future seasons worthwhile. This previously happened with Fox's handling of *Ash Vs Evil*

I want my *Revenge*!

Hi. Following your advice I got in touch with Universal about the disc replacement scheme for *Revenge of the Creature 3D*. It informed me it only deals with the US and Canada. How can people like me who bought a US copy of *Revenge of the Creature 3D* get a replacement disc? I got mine from Amazon – all it can do is offer your money back if you return it. Do you know if it will be released over here?

Frederick Elliott

Anton van Beek replies: Sadly, with the replacement scheme being limited to North America, it looks like returning the set to the retailer for a refund is really your only option. And as Universal UK currently has no plans to release the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* trilogy here (we asked), you may have to re-buy the US set when the corrected version goes into circulation.

Universal is re-issuing
Revenge of the Creature
on 3D BD – but only in
the US and Canada



Dead in the UK – and it even went so far as to revisit the previously DVD-only first season on Blu-ray, alongside the arrival of the second season on both formats.

Outside of that, it appears you're out of luck, as a quick scour of the internet reveals no Blu-ray release for *The Orville* in any other territories, either.

More love for High-Fidelity Pure Audio Blu-ray

Watcha guys. I'm so glad to see another reader using their home cinema for more than just watching movies [Goodbye to Elton John?, Feedback, HCC #291].

I have written in before about this subject and am pleased to discover someone else finds *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* a disc worth owning. I know Mark Craven mentioned that Blu-ray audio had been mothballed in 2016 but I've recently bought *The Alan Parsons Project – Eye in the Sky*, which I think was released on this format in 2017.

I don't know if any other albums have crept through since then but it remains an interesting format.

Lee Regan

Mark Craven replies: I didn't know about the Alan Parsons Project release, so thanks for pointing that out Lee. *Eye in the Sky* was reissued in late 2017 as a 35th Anniversary edition boxset packing twin vinyl, CD and Blu-ray – the latter offering a new 5.1 mix. More recently, this audio-only BD received a standalone release (by Real Gone Music in the US and Sony Music in the UK).

The packaging (at least on the US disc) describes it as High-Fidelity Pure Audio but – as mentioned in my answer to Brian Langford's letter last issue – this is just a catch-all term and doesn't denote a 'new' disc format. High-Fidelity Pure Audio was an initiative of Universal Music Group (UMG), and that company's releases shared a branding theme. As far as I am aware (and, again, I may be wrong) UMG has stopped releasing titles under the High-Fidelity Pure Audio banner, which is why I said it had been mothballed.

Of course, there's no harm in another label picking up the baton if it keeps music fans happy.

Questions about 8K TV

I was an 'early adopter' of 4K having bought a Sony X9005 TV in 2014 (which has since been replaced) so I'm curious about 8K models now appearing and likely more interested than most other shoppers.

But the recent launches and demos that you reported on in the last issue [IFA show report, HCC #291] have got me wondering how quickly, if at all, 8K TVs will take hold? Early 4K TV owners always knew that a 4K Ultra HD disc format/games consoles

★ Star Letter...

I've got a funny feeling about this...

Paying twenty-five quid for a movie. Looking to America for titles unavailable in the UK. Not having to think about region coding. Wishing that the catalogue wasn't still so meagre. Eagerly scanning lists of new releases to see if our special favourites have finally graduated to the premium format. How amusing it is that collecting UHD Blu-rays in 2018 feels exactly the same as collecting 12in Laserdiscs back in 1993.

Richard

Mark Craven replies: Your letter made me laugh, even though I am too young to have been collecting Laserdiscs in 1993 – or, rather, I was too poverty-stricken and was stuck with VHS instead, which was a sure-fire way to fill up a shelf quickly just down to the size of the packaging.

I've had other people make the Laserdisc/4K comparison, and it's always done with a nostalgic sigh. Might it be that one day the UHD disc format will be held in the same high regard as Laserdisc is now?

As you say, the current 4K market is a bit up and down. There are the expected new-release blockbusters, and with Disney now finally onboard it appears safe to say the format isn't going to die out anytime soon.

But the approach to back-catalogue content remains puzzling. We're witnessing a bit of a torrent of older titles at the moment – this issue we've looked at the

original X-Men trilogy (see p97) and next month should be casting an eye over legacy titles including *Superman: The Movie* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Yet I still can't fathom the overall release strategy. Choose any studio at random and there's an obvious 'missing' title that should have been released by now. Universal? *Jaws*. Fox? *Alien*. Warner Bros? *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*.

Okay, maybe not the last one.

Star letter-writer Richard grabs the explosive Asian action blockbuster *Operation Red Sea* on Blu-ray. Inspired by real events and directed by 'maverick filmmaker' Dante Lam, the action-packed *Operation Red Sea* finds the Chinese Navy's elite Assault Team embarking on a deadly mission to stop a terrorist from acquiring materials to build a nuclear weapon. A smash hit at the Chinese box office earlier this year, *Operation Red Sea* is available now to own on Blu-ray, DVD and Digital Download, courtesy of Trinity Film and its Cine Asia label.



would arrive in the near future, but it seems to me that 8K is being launched with no real content whatsoever.

Terence

Mark Craven replies: Well, Samsung certainly seems to think the format has legs, and its case will be strengthened by any HDMI 2.1 hardware ecosystem that may evolve. Really, though, 8K feels like an upscaling technology at present. It's not as if there's an obvious source development around the corner that makes purchase of an 8K display a vital consideration. The question is more: do you want to see your 4K and HD sources look better than ever?

Additionally, more brands joining the 8K brigade will bolster the format's chances of survival – for it to 'take hold' it needs adoption across the industry, not just from a few players. You can expect LG to follow Samsung down the pixel path, and Sony wowed with a 10,000-nit prototype at this year's CES. What Panasonic and Philips have planned remains to be seen.

As always, it will be up to consumers to decide. Samsung's 65in model at £5,000 seems reasonable, but prices will have to head south for 8K to be anything other than a niche technology. And right now, I think most shoppers (as you say) are more interested in upgrading from HD to 4K.

QLED quandary

I am a long-time reader of your excellent mag and am hoping you may be able to give me some advice in relation to intermittent and random stutter I am experiencing on my recently purchased Samsung 65Q9FN when using an Oppo UDP-205 and a modified all-region Cambridge Audio BD player.

I use AudioQuest HDMI cables to connect the video signal to the Samsung's One Connect box and run the audio out via HDMI to an Onkyo RZ5100 preamp for both players. I have the latest firmware installed, use an Isotek power conditioner, have motion on the TV set to custom at 0, which I have increased on occasions to no avail, and have done a soft reset and have had Samsung do a hard reset remotely, but I still experience this intermittent and random stutter that involves movement and lasts a fraction of a second... but is spoiling my enjoyment with this great TV.

My previous Full HD Sony Bravia never exhibited this issue and I was using a similar setup.

Terry Riley, Melbourne, Australia

John Archer replies: I use a Q9FN and Oppo UDP-205 for almost all my movie viewing. The bad news is that I can't replicate your issue.

I'm not fully sure what I'm looking for based on your description – especially when the issue is 'intermittent and random'. But I've seen stutter on other TVs, so I feel I'd be pretty sensitive to seeing it on the Samsung.

The only way I can think of to help is to share my own motion-related settings. First, I use the Standard picture preset, not Movie. Definitely try this if you haven't already.

Switch off LED Clear Motion, and set Auto Motion Plus to Custom, with Blur and Judder reduction both set to 3. I leave Digital Clean View off, Local Dimming on High, and the Contrast Enhancer on Low. Film Mode should be off (and greyed out).



Samsung's Q9FN offers customisable motion processing

You could perhaps also check the settings of your disc players. It seems unlikely these should be causing the issue (the problem seems to be how your TV is handling a 24p input), but make sure on the Oppo that Output Resolution is Auto, Custom Resolution is UHD Auto, Color Space is Auto, Colour Depth is Auto, De-interlacing mode is Auto, and DVD 24p Conversion is off.

Dimensions, please!

Your 'Dream Theatre' articles are always inspirational and aspirational. I would ask, though, that you quote the sizes of the rooms hosting these fabulous installations.

I recognise, of course, that the dimensions can be estimated crudely from the screen sizes quoted in the text, and from the number and distribution of cinema seats, but a flat statement of length, width and height would be most useful for those planning their setups, be they modest or ambitious.

Dr. Fraser M Hadden

Mark Craven replies: Yes, we can see how that might be useful – so we'll endeavour to do this in the future. But be prepared for some of these custom cinemas to be somewhat larger than most regular living spaces!

I love the extras

My view on Michael O'Grady's Star Letter in the last issue [HCC #291] is that we should be getting more extra features on Blu-rays/4K Blu-rays. Some of us still love them.

If you ask me the DVD era was when film companies last really made an effort. You can tell this as Blu-ray releases still have the same extra features from the DVD version 15 years ago! The *Alien Quadrilogy* boxset was my favourite – I'd love to see the same care given to today's big movies. Too many extras these days are short and lacking in real information.

Simon Cooper

Anton van Beek replies: The DVD era was great for bonus bits, as studios started to make use of the storage capabilities and menu structures to beef up movie releases. It seems they're less excited by all that now – perhaps they've done research and decided most disc buyers don't check out the extra features?

We do still get excellent *Making of...* docs and commentary tracks, of course. The full-length documentary on the *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* Blu-ray is an example. However, often the most informative material accompanies esoteric releases, such as the *Making of...* on the Blu-ray of cult sci-fi *Xtro*, which is better than the film itself ■

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Ash vs Evil Dead: The Complete Series

The third and final season of the cult TV show following the adventures of the chainsaw-wielding Deadite slayer Ash Williams is now available to own, both by itself and as part of...*The Complete Series: Seasons 1-3* boxset, on DVD and Blu-ray. Thanks to Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment we have three copies of the...*Seasons 1-3* Blu-ray boxset to be won!

Question:

Which 'Sam' directed the original trilogy of *Evil Dead* movies?

Answer:

- A) Sam Raimi
- B) Sam Mendes
- C) Sam Taylor-Johnson



Mandy

Nicolas Cage finally gets the perfect outlet for his more visceral acting style in this phantasmagoric revenge movie from writer-director Panos

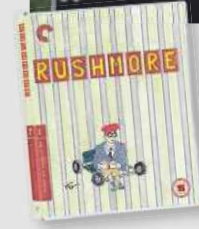
Cosmastos. *Mandy* sliced and diced its way onto DVD and Blu-ray at the end of October, and thanks to Universal Pictures we have five Blu-rays up for grabs!

Question:

The song *Mandy* was a hit in 1974 for which of the following musicians?

Answer:

- A) Cliff Richard
- B) Barry Manilow
- C) Iggy Pop



Rushmore

Acclaimed filmmaker Wes Anderson's dazzling sophomore movie recently made its UK Blu-ray debut courtesy of The Criterion Collection and Sony

Pictures Home Entertainment. To mark the release we've got five *Rushmore* Blu-rays to give away. To be in with a chance of winning one, answer the following question correctly...

Question:

Wes Anderson directed an animated bigscreen adaptation of which Roald Dahl novel?

Answer:

- A) *James and the Giant Peach*
- B) *Fantastic Mr. Fox*
- C) *The Enormous Crocodile*



Long Weekend

Nature wreaks its revenge on a careless couple camping in the Australian wilderness in Colin Eggleston's 1978 'Ozploitation' classic.

Long Weekend makes its long-awaited UK Blu-ray debut on November 5 courtesy of Second Sight – and to celebrate the release we have five copies of the Blu-ray to be won!

Question:

Long Weekend writer Everett De Roche also wrote which of these killer pig films?

Answer:

- A) *Razorback*
- B) *Pig Hunt*
- C) *Chaw*

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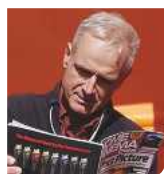
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Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Ion** enjoys 7.2.4 surround sound in his dedicated projector-based cinema room – but a lot of effort went into making it look and sound its best...



Ion decided he wanted his Monitor Audio Platinum speakers on show rather than behind the screen wall



Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame! Introduce yourself...

My name is Ion Mitchell, 65, and I'm a retired management consultant living in Surrey.

How long have you been into home cinema, and what was the first setup you had?

I've messed about with home cinema for a while, starting with a 32in Philips CRT which had small satellite speakers for surround sound. Then around 2004 I bought a Panasonic plasma for its widescreen picture. Before too long the plasma moved into the kitchen and I bought an Optoma projector for

the living room. It was light enough to move on/off the coffee table and the screen was hidden in the ceiling. But adding a Denon AVR-3803 receiver and Energy Veritas speakers meant the sound was anything but discreet.

I loved the performance but hated lowering the volume for neighbourly relations, and since the cinema was part of the living room it was a lot of work to stop window light spilling onto the screen. I promised myself I'd build a dedicated cinema room if I ever got the chance.

That chance came in 2013 when we moved house. We built the bare shell of a cinema room next to the garage but away from the house to keep the noise down. I planned to fit the interior myself but other priorities delayed the start until May 2017. Then my wife asked if it would be ready by Christmas. Hubris said yes...

What kit's in your system?

The projector is an Epson EH-TW9000, used with a 120in Elite Acousticpro 4K woven screen. Speakers are Monitor Audio Platinum 300s (fronts/centre), Monitor Audio Silver FX (surrounds) and Monitor Audio Climate (Atmos/ceiling). The subs are an SVS SB13-Ultra and Infinity Kappa.

My AVR is Denon's nine-channel AVR-X4400H, bolstered by a Marantz MM7025 stereo amp. Also in the system is a Panasonic BDT310 Blu-ray player, an HD Anywhere 4x4 matrix, and an AC Infinity Aircom cooler.

What was the hardest part of your build?

The biggest obstacle turned out to be the room itself. Designed to be robust and well



When I moved house, he decided there was space to build a cinema room next to the garage – and hopefully far enough away not to annoy the neighbours



Mid-way through he realised the finished structure would need acoustic treatments – here two of the eventual six bass traps are in situ

insulated, it had inadvertently taken on the acoustic properties of a bell; using an acoustic program downloaded from the internet, I was horrified to find bass frequencies taking more than 1500ms to decay and the axial modes around 50Hz varying by 45dB between peaks and nulls. I could never hope to fix this with auto EQ on an AVR or subwoofers, so the only solution was to build several (eventually six) large bass traps and hide them behind the screen wall.

I had originally planned to site the front/centre speakers behind this single wall of black acoustically transparent fabric too. This meant I could use any speakers rated by HCC reviewers as sonic gold but aesthetically challenged; being either too big or too ugly (we needn't mention any

names). But when I saw the Rosewood finish on the Monitor Audio Platinum speakers I thought they deserved to be seen. So I had to create alcoves in the screen wall for them to sit.

Where have you housed the rest of your AV equipment?

Good question. I planned to also hide the electronics behind the screen wall, directly below the centre speaker. But in retrospect, I didn't leave enough room behind the Denon AV receiver for the cables and speaker wires, which all needed extra depth. The only solution was to put the AVR on a shelf that slides out and rotates. It's definitely a jumble of cables; certainly not the rack porn you see on pro installs, but it does all fit.

For disc storage I could have added a cabinet but I thought it would detract from the clean look of the room. Instead, I built a shelf unit in the house, with all the DVDs on one side and Blu-rays on the other.

Did you meet your self-imposed Christmas deadline?

There was definitely a big push to finish all the loose ends like LED lighting/soffits, wall papering, painting and carpeting. But I did manage to wheeze across the finish line two days before Christmas.

Unveiling the cinema to friends and neighbours was very satisfying. For our first movie the missus chose *Notting Hill*. It looked great but I properly christened the room later with viewings of *John Wick* and *Baby Driver*. It definitely goes loud, so I'm afraid the neighbours can still hear me.

What's your favourite bit of kit and why?

During the recent heat wave it was definitely my Daiken air conditioner. I had to turn it well down to keep people from falling asleep in the middle of the day.

Otherwise it has to be the Marantz MM7025 two-channel amplifier. I wanted extra power to drive the big speakers in front. By purchasing the Denon X4400H instead of the 11-channel Denon X6400H I saved enough to pay for the Marantz. And the X4400H has the same 11-channel processor as the X6400H.



A pro-level Atmos screening room featured in HCC inspired the on-ceiling speaker choice

Do you already have your eye on any upgrades?

The oldest bit of kit is the Epson projector. I'm still pretty happy with it but I know there is a 4K laser projector somewhere down the road. I'm just not willing to spend a five figure sum, so I'll wait for prices to come down.

Are you happy with your Dolby Atmos installation?

Definitely. Atmos wasn't even on the horizon when I first built the room but the idea of 3D sound objects made sense and it would have been much harder to retrofit later. I decided to mount the speakers under the ceiling after I got the idea from some pro-grade installs, such as the Dream Theatre in HCC #259 [Atmos screening room by Vivid Research], and other Dolby reference theatres. I know this won't be to everyone's taste but I liked the industrial look. It also made it easy to tweak where the drivers were pointing. And because the models were from Monitor Audio, I thought they would more likely match the other speakers' timbre.

How did you choose your ceiling design?

At first, I just liked the look of slatted ceilings/walls that you see in recording studios. It then occurred to me that lowering the slats would leave a gap for unexpected cable changes (projector or speakers) without having to re-cut holes in the ceiling. Plus, the spacing between slats was calculated to offer some benefit as a Helmholtz absorber since the room's acoustics needed all the help it could get.

Did you always plan two rows of seating?

Yes, the room is 6.2m x 4.8m, so not big enough for three rows. And only one row would have been downright unfriendly.

Personally, I like to sit nearer the front to get more sense of 'immersion'. That meant sitting 3.6m from the screen to get a field-of-view of



Our AV-Holic keeps his Denon receiver/Marantz amp combi on a slide-out shelf for quick access, while DVDs/Blu-rays are stored in the house

about 42 degrees. That left enough room for the second row to see over the first row and still extend the foot rests. The real challenge was the riser itself since its construction could affect the room's acoustics. To avoid vibrating like a drum it needed a 2in layer of plywood and mass-loaded vinyl for damping. And to help absorb some of the room's excessive bass resonance it had to be built as a single continuous void with rear vents and fluffy insulation. I can say that I'm happy with the result but it certainly wasn't the simple wooden platform I originally envisioned.

I once wrote into HCC saying that a good-sounding system needs a room with good acoustics as well as good equipment. In retrospect, that was easier to write than actually do. But, at a minimum, I still think everyone should consider measuring their cinema room's performance. The software is free and a calibrated mic costs less than £100. Any fix may be harder.

Do you stream movies/TV from Netflix/Amazon/Sky etc?

Not really. Our internet connection is too slow (14Mbps) to reliably stream without stuttering/buffering but I do use the HD Anywhere 4x4 matrix to watch Sky HD with no loss in quality. I watched *Blade Runner 2049* the other day and saw the 4K/Atmos disc was running at 36Mbps. It'll be a long, long time before I can get that sort of speed from my ISP.



What movies/discs do you use to show off your system?

I usually leave the intellectual stuff on the shelf and play something impactful, like *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Star Trek* (2009), *Baby Driver* or *Hugo* (for 3D).

If we want hooligan levels, I also use the depth charge scene in *Das Boot* or *Queen: Live at Wembley*.

And what are your Top 5 favourite flicks?

That seems to change on a daily basis. Currently: *Departures*, *Oblivion*, *John Wick*, *Blade Runner 2049* and *LOTR*.

Lastly, what do your friends and family think of the cinema room?

The lighting and minimalist design always makes a great first impression. But they are genuinely gobsmacked when I turn off the lights and demo something with Atmos or 3D. My only regret is that we don't see enough movies during weekdays ■

Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

- movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.
4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Now what?

Email your images to **letters@homecinemachoice.com** with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the relevant questions above – then we'll be in touch!



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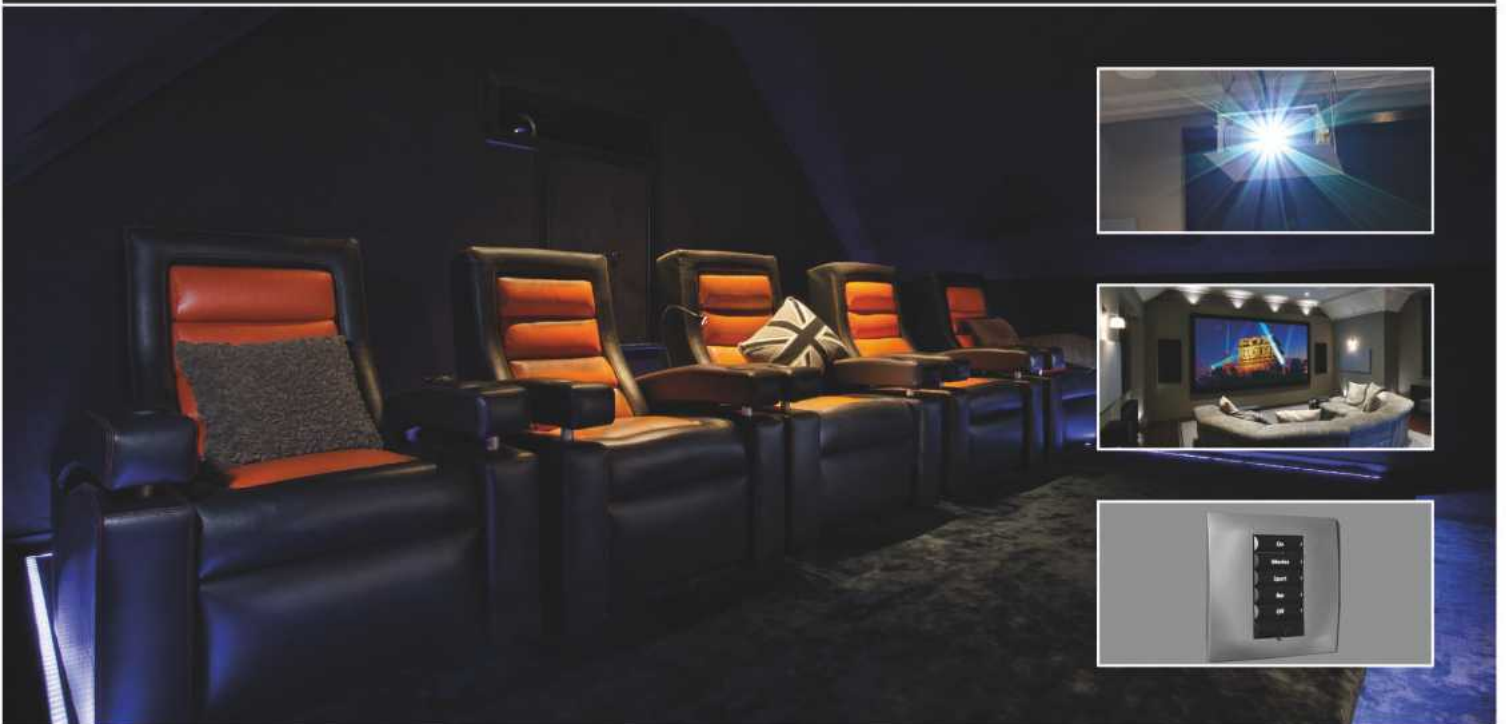
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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **SKYSCRAPER** Taking action cinema to new heights? **JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM** The living fossils go Gothic **CANDYMAN** Newly restored sweets for the sweet **A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH** Fall in love with Powell and Pressburger's heavenly romance on Blu-ray **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** 'It's in the trees! It's coming!' & MORE!

A scoundrel's story

Solo: A Star Wars Story → Walt Disney → Ultra HD Blu-ray



If you've ever wondered how Han met Chewie or what exactly makes the Kessel Run so hard, the latest *Star Wars* spin-off/prequel has the answers. We give the Ultra HD Blu-ray a spin on p94...

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★★☆☆
Dire	★★★☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

'My, what big teeth you have...'



4K platter with plenty of bite

Superb picture and sound go a long way to papering over this sequel's other shortcomings



→ JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM

While *Jurassic World* rebooted the *Jurassic Park* franchise more successfully than expected, this follow-up struggles to keep the energy flowing. Its story of dodgy dudes trying to get dinosaurs off a now doomed Isla Nublar so they can sell them to an international coterie of moustache-twirling villains finds the first two thirds of the film feeling like a clumsier rehash of the last half of *Jurassic World*.

The final act thankfully heads in a new direction, giving us essentially a 'monster in the house' Gothic horror movie. But while this section is more engaging and beautifully shot, it suffers from director J. A. Bayona's obsession with referencing other films.

Picture: ...*Fallen Kingdom* is comfortably the best-looking *Jurassic* 4K Blu-ray release to date. Perhaps because it was mostly filmed at resolutions of 6.5K and 4K (with effects apparently rendered in 6K), the Ultra HD image is far more detailed than the Full HD Blu-ray – despite its visuals seemingly being ultimately derived from a 2K Digital Intermediate.

The UHD disc's use of HDR and wide colour is also excellent. The extra brightness helps daylight scenes look more realistic, and Isla Nublar's dinosaurs alarmingly lifelike.

Even better, the brightness gets far more impact from the Lockwood Mansion's beautiful lighting, bolstering the intensity of its atmospheric mix of shadows and artificial light. There's more subtlety, vibrancy and warmth in the mansion's lush decor, making the monster stalking its halls feel scarily incongruous.

The film will play in Dolby Vision HDR, rather than HDR10, into a compatible display, making its HDR/wide colour enhancements even more effective.

Audio: Also working hard to distract you from the film's narrative failings is an excellent DTS:X audio soundtrack. This combines huge dynamics (you'll believe a *Brachiosaurus* just walked through your room) with superb clarity and lively use of the rear, side and height channels for both ambience and precise effects. The dino stampede sequence is an absolute blast.

Extras: Pleasingly, ...*Fallen Kingdom*'s extras are all found on the 4K disc as well as the Full HD platter that accompanies it in Universal's release. These bonus bits are fairly entertaining, too, thanks to a preference for short, informal vignettes – some shot and hosted by star Chris Pratt – about different aspects of the filmmaking process, from dino FX to location and soundstage shooting. What you don't get is anything with any real meat; there's no commentary track, nor any featurette running longer than around 10 minutes. **JA**



HCC VERDICT

Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom

→ Universal Pictures → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £40

WE SAY: While the story is patchy, ...*Fallen Kingdom* looks and sounds lovely in its 4K Blu-ray clothes.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

The Crown: Season Two

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£45



Stretching from the Suez crisis to the Profumo affair, this sophomore season of Netflix's regal drama

continues to impress with its excellent writing, nuanced performances and gorgeous production design. Even though these 10 episodes aren't available on disc in 4K (as they are on Netflix), Sony's four-disc BD set still delivers beautifully detailed 2.00:1-framed 1080p visuals and immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Bonuses include pop-up trivia for each episode and three short featurettes – one of which looks at the veracity of the show. **MC**



Vikings: Season 5 – Volume 1

Twentieth Century Fox → All-region BD
£34



For all of the fire and fury on show in these 10 episodes, there's a huge Ragnar Lothbrok-shaped hole in this

entertaining historical drama following the departure of former lead actor Travis Fimmel last season. While the series itself is a bit of a rollercoaster in terms of quality this time out, this three-disc set's Full HD encodes and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes are as impressive as ever (even if the ever-present blue grading gets a little tiresome). Also included are 13 deleted scenes, two featurettes and a commentary on the final episode. **AvB**



Adrift

STX/Sony Pictures → Region B BD
£22



Everest director Baltasar Kormákur tackles another true-life tale of man (or in this case: woman)-versus-nature with this tale of a young couple adrift on a damaged sailboat

in the Pacific. As with *Everest*, Kormákur does an excellent job of bringing a feeling of authenticity to the central incident, but this time out the emotional beats surrounding it are significantly less convincing. On a more positive note, the 2.40:1-framed 1080p encode is pristine and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix conjures up an extremely active 360-degree soundscape. A chat-track is the pick of the otherwise forgettable extras. **AvB**



Burning down the house

Hollywood's hardest-working action superstar aims high, only to fall short

→ SKYSCRAPER

As much as we love Dwayne Johnson, he really could do with being a bit pickier when it comes to choosing the projects he takes on. Still, it's quite possible that this mash-up of *Die Hard* and *The Towering Inferno* looked pretty good on paper – heck, as a setup it sounded pretty enticing to us, too.

Sadly, beyond making Johnson's security analyst an amputee, *Skyscraper* doesn't have an original idea in its empty head. Each story beat and action scene feels so overly familiar that you are constantly ten steps ahead of the plot at every single turn. Even Johnson's recent videogame adaptation *Rampage* was more fun than this, with its wildly shifting tone at least throwing some curveballs.

As is so often the case, the film's saving grace is its leading man. Johnson's charisma and physicality ensures this braindead blockbuster is never less than watchable. But would it really be too much to ask for a story that is capable of throwing up a surprise or two? Apparently so.

Picture: *Skyscraper's* AVC 2.40:1-framed 1080p encode is a real stunner. While several CG shots of the exterior of the tower appear a little soft (especially the early daylight ones), for the most part the film is crisp and sharp. Fine textures are on show throughout, even in the darkest scenes (aided by excellent black levels that reveal plenty of shadow detail). Meanwhile, the colour palette – especially the vibrant oranges and yellows of the raging inferno – is impeccably rendered.

Audio: A reference-quality Dolby Atmos soundtrack provides the perfect aural accompaniment to the



Blu-ray's impressive Full HD visuals. As much fun as the sound designers clearly had filling the entire soundstage with atmospheric effects, things really heat up when the fire gets going. From that point on the mix delivers a cacophony of dynamic surround effects, with flames swelling around you and rushing up above you head (Chapter 11's burning park is a particular highlight). Bass is also extremely deep and resonant, giving explosions plenty of extra oomph.

Extras: This thoroughly average film is supported by a thoroughly average collection of bonus features. Director Rawson Marshall Thurber provides a solo commentary for the movie, as well pulling the same duty on the disc's five deleted scenes and five extended scenes (none of which are particularly essential). The remaining extras take the form of five very short behind-the-scenes featurettes, plus a not especially amusing anecdote about how the film was pitched to Johnson and how he replied. **AvB**



Neve Campbell stars as Johnson's wife, who also gets caught up in the blaze

HCC VERDICT

Skyscraper

→ Universal Pictures
→ All-region BD → £25

WE SAY: This doesn't reach new heights for action cinema, but in AV terms it's a towering success.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

The one and only

Disney's space caper benefits from the light touch direction of Ron Howard, but arrives on 4K BD still looking pretty dark...



→ SOLO: A STAR WARS STORY

Talented young pilot (and orphan) Han manages to break free of a life of petty crime on the planet Corellia, but becomes separated from his sweetheart in the process. Alone in a galaxy far, far away, he eventually befriends a Wookiee named Chewbacca, joins a criminal gang, acquires the last name Solo, flies the Millennium Falcon, bumps into his old flame and even manages to make the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs.

Solo: A Star Wars Story is now famous for falling way short of box office expectations, and industry analysts have filled column inches in the months since its release trying to nail down why.

Suggested reasons include its May opening slot, *Star Wars* fan fatigue, its relatively unknown cast, a much-publicised troubled production history, or a social media campaign conducted by Russian internet bots. Throwing a spanner in the works is the fact it's actually a fine movie, a thrilling space adventure with quick wits and solid staging.

The absence of Force-related mysticism or a climactic space battle certainly makes it an outlier in the *Star Wars* franchise; instead we get a smaller-scale sci-fi heist/action movie that canter along at a breezy pace.

There's little sign of the rush job feared when original directing duo Phil Lord and Christopher Miller were dumped in favour of veteran Ron Howard way into production. *Solo...* is a competent slice of mainstream cinema, with slick VFX and tight plotting.

Donald Glover (as Lando Calrissian) and Woody Harrelson (as Han's crime boss Beckett) do fine work, but the star is Alden Ehrenreich as the title character. Taking over an iconic role is no easy task, but Ehrenreich has enough about him physically to call to mind Harrison Ford's swaggering performances in the original trilogy, and a gun-slinging style of his own.

Picture: How much you appreciate the picture quality of the *Solo...* Ultra HD Blu-ray depends on how much you appreciate authenticity over the 4K format's usual razzle and dazzle.

The thing is, compared with other *Star Wars* releases – and other films generally, actually – *Solo...* was lensed in a pretty dour way. The idea being, presumably, to give it a grittier, edgier, grubbier feel in keeping with Han Solo's less than glamorous life.

As a result, the image is often quite dark and murky, lacking both the contrast and the extreme sharpness you'd usually associate with a 4K Blu-ray. In fact, it looks positively soft at times.

The disc's image is apparently derived from a 4K DI. This fact, together with memories of seeing the film on its theatrical release, suggests that while the *Solo...* 4K Blu-ray won't become a favourite demo disc for most AV fans, its picture is in line with how the filmmakers wanted it to look.



That's another set of action figures in the making...

Also, if you stick with it, some shots and sequences do actually dazzle. The impressive train robbery scene, for instance, combines artfully rendered greys, skies and metallic reflections with some truly impactful explosions. The artificial lighting in some of the film's interiors – especially the shiny new Millennium Falcon – also looks gorgeously 'poppy' and precise.

And compared with the 1080p Blu-ray, Disney's 4K platter reveals substantially more subtle texturing and colour minutiae, further underlining the sensation that – aside from some rather inconsistent black levels, perhaps – the disc is accurately capturing the look of the film.

Solo... does not find Disney returning to providing a Dolby Vision master alongside the standard HDR10 one, which is another gripe altogether.

Audio: This Dolby Atmos mix is fortunately not another Disney dud. There's more consistent and effective use of the rear/surround channels, and galactic levels of bass kicking in at times. These hit depths of rumble far beyond anything you get from constrained Disney mixes such as *Black Panther* and, particularly, *Thor: Ragnarok*.

Treble detailing is plentiful and avoids that thin, boxed-in tone some Disney mixes have been guilty of.

There are still a few issues. Dialogue can sound detached from the mix at times. Height channels are used less aggressively than some will like. And, finally, while there's rich bass here, it tends to only explode into life during the very loudest parts of the movie. LFE is rarely used to subtly underpin less 'emphatic' moments.

Extras: With no commentary track provided, all of *Solo...*'s extras are relegated to a bonus Blu-ray platter. There you'll find a lively roundtable chat with director and cast; an interview with writers Lawrence and Jonathan Kasdan; seven behind-the-scenes featurettes (*Remaking the Millennium Falcon*, *Escape from Corellia*, *The Train Heist*, *Team Chewie*, *Becoming a Droid: L3-37*, *Into the Maelstrom: The Kessel Run*, and *Scoundrels, Droids, Creatures and Cards: Fort Ypsa*); and eight deleted scenes, the best of which sees Han and Chewie enjoying a snowball fight.

While this is all enjoyable enough, anybody hoping for something as candid as the documentary that accompanied *The Last Jedi*, or insight into the change of director, will be disappointed. **MC & JA**



Donald Glover's Lando (below) is one of the film's unqualified successes



HCC VERDICT

Solo: A Star Wars Story

→ Walt Disney → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £37

WE SAY: A *Star Wars* flick that deserves more love on a competent but unflashy 4K release.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



Shadow of the Tomb Raider

Square Enix → PS4, Xbox One, Windows PC
→ £55

The game adventures of Lara Croft have spanned more than two decades and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* finally brings us back to the beginning of her journey. It's the third and last in the reboot trilogy that started with 2013's *Tomb Raider*, and is easily Ms. Croft's finest outing yet.

Those familiar with the last two titles in the franchise will find the game easy to pick up. Many of Lara's moves and combat abilities are similar. There are a few enhancements and a new skill tree, but they are evolutionary changes rather than an overhaul.

Where the game does feel different, however, is that gunplay and fight scenes are regularly downplayed. Stealth is a much higher priority this time around, and creeping through the undergrowth is better rewarded, even necessary for much of the adventure.

There is also much more to do. The map is largely open-world and, like last time, there are side quests and additional puzzle tombs aplenty. But there is more of a role-playing feel to *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* that hasn't been present before, with NPCs (non-player characters) popping up in every location – often asking you to fetch something or solve a riddle.

Indeed, we found ourselves wandering far away from the main narrative for hours on end. This not only prolongs the play time (one of our few criticisms of the two

previous games) but also helps you level Lara up.

The game looks stunning too – easily the best *Tomb Raider* yet. We played it on an Xbox One X in 4K HDR and Xbox One S in 1080p HDR and while there is clearly a detail differential between them it was the high dynamic range colours and contrast that made the jungle standout more significantly.

Voice acting is excellent throughout and the surround sound score and effect-laden audio are of a suitably cinematic quality – huge, urgent and bombastic in all the right places.

This is Lara's last journey in this particular storyline and her origin plot certainly gets the ending it need. It also sets us up beautifully for at least another two decades of tomb raiding fun.



City Hunter

Eureka Classics → Region B BD
£20



Jackie Chan leers at women and indulges in some *Street Fighter II* cosplay in this wacky action-comedy that plays out like *Die Hard* on a cruise ship done in the style of a live-action *Looney*

Tunes cartoon. While the film itself is a bit of a mess, this new 2K restoration is excellent, really showcasing the bold comic book aesthetic (there are a couple of softer shots that stand out, but this is presumably down to the source materials). Cantonese and English 2.0 and 5.1 mixes are also provided, while extras include six archival interviews and outtakes. **AvB**



Revenge

Vertigo Films → Region B BD
£10



If you have an aversion to blood, you'd do well to steer clear of French writer-director Coraline Fargeat's bold and brutal exploitation fantasy, which spills more claret than all of

the *Halloween* sequels put together. If Fargeat's 'feminist' makeover of the film's rape-revenge setup isn't quite as radical as you may have been led to believe, it's still a thrillingly stylish and subversive piece of cinema. Pretty much devoid of extras (a trailer is all you get), this Blu-ray does at least do a superb job of handling the film's eye-searing 2.40:1 Full HD imagery and energetic DTS-HD MA 5.1 sound design. **AvB**



12 Monkeys

Arrow Video → Region B BD
£25



Terry Gilliam's 1995 sci-fi smash didn't strike us a film in desperate need of revisiting on Blu-ray, but one look at Arrow's new restoration (from a 4K scan of the 35mm negative with

grading supervised by Gilliam) makes it clear just how much room for improvement was left by Universal's original Full HD release. In addition to the commentary, *The Hamster Factor...* feature-length documentary and extensive image gallery from the old disc, this new BD offers a 1996 Q&A with Gilliam, an appreciation by film scholar Ian Christie, and a trailer. **MC**





UHD boxset has the X factor

Impressive new 4K transfers go a long way to making up for this set's missing bonus features

→ X-MEN: 3-FILM COLLECTION

It's hard to believe the *X-Men* franchise is almost twenty years old. The original film kickstarted the current era of comic book capers and put Marvel firmly on the cinematic map. It remains an entertaining flick, establishing the characters and setting up the world of good and bad mutants.

X2: X-Men United is an absolute classic, and having already created the universe in the first film, the story hits the ground running and doesn't stop. It's bursting with confidence, boasts a superb cast, delivers some excellent set-pieces, and is easily the best entry in the franchise.

Sadly *X-Men: The Last Stand* is a disappointment, and this troubled production not only bungled the popular *Dark Phoenix* Saga comic book storyline, but left fans so unsatisfied that the entire film was erased from the franchise's continuity by 2014's *X-Men: Days of Future Past*.

Picture: The first two *X-Men* entries were shot on film, and Fox has created new 4K scans of both for this release. The results are spectacular, with each presented in its 2.40:1 theatrical aspect ratio, and given an HDR10 pass.

The level of detail is often exceptional, especially in close-ups,

although it does mean some of the CG effects look a bit ropery. There's a healthy sheen of grain, the blacks are deep, the whites crisp, and the colours beautifully saturated. HDR also adds to proceedings, helping to make these new 4K platters a clear improvement over the previous Blu-rays.

X-Men: The Last Stand was also lensed on film and framed at 2.40:1, but was recent enough to use a 2K Digital Intermediate, which forms the basis of this new encode. As a result its imagery isn't quite as detailed as the other two films, and there are less differences compared to the 1080p disc. Yet the addition of HDR adds subtle improvements, even if the colours can run a bit hot at times and grain is even more pronounced.

Audio: Sadly there are no immersive audio remixes, and each movie sports the same DTS-HD MA 5.1 (6.1 in the case of the third film) soundtrack found on the earlier Full HD Blu-ray platters. The good news is they're all really aggressive mixes, with enough bass and surround action to keep even the most ardent object audio fan happy.

Extras: Disappointingly, not only has Fox created no new extras for this 4K set, it has also ditched the bonus discs for each film that were included in the studio's 2009 *X-Men Trilogy* Blu-ray boxset.

That said, there are still plenty of goodies to sink your teeth into. There are commentaries for each film (two for the second and third) that appear on both the set's 4K and Full HD discs, while the latter also host deleted scenes, behind-the-scenes featurettes, animatics and other goodies. **SW**



The cinematic saga continues in next year's *X-Men: Dark Phoenix*



HCC VERDICT

X-Men: 3-Film Collection

→ Twentieth Century Fox → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £44

WE SAY: Despite the missing extras and lack of audio upgrades, fans will love these new 4K transfers.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



'Ooh, heaven is a place on earth'

Has ITV crafted a suitably divine replacement for the cancelled UK Criterion release?

→ A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

This dazzling 1946 romantic fantasy from filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger stars David Niven as RAF pilot Peter Carter, who miraculously survives when his plane is shot down during World War II, despite not having a working parachute.

It appears that Peter's survival was indeed something of a divine oversight and he is soon contacted by a representative for 'the Other Place' who asks Peter to accept his death and come with him. But, having fallen in love with the American radio operator (Kim Hunter) he spoke to in the moments leading up to the crash, Peter instead requests the chance to appeal the decision...

Perhaps the most beautiful of Powell and Pressburger's films (which is truly saying something), *A Matter of Life and Death* is a remarkable piece of filmmaking that manages to find a seamless balance between celebrating the power of love and exploring the history of Anglo-US relations.

Anchoring all of this is Jack Cardiff's gorgeous cinematography. The decision to shoot the 'Earthy' scenes in colour and render 'the Other Place' in black- and-white ('One is starved for Technicolor up there,' states Peter's contact) may confound expectations, but it's a perfect cinematic visual representation of the story's thematic centre.

Picture: A UK Blu-ray release of *A Matter of Life and Death* was originally announced earlier this year by The Criterion Collection, only to be quickly pulled from the schedules, presumably due to rights issues (the US release went ahead as planned).



The film was originally retitled *Stairway to Heaven* in the US

In its place we instead get this ITV Steelbook – and the good news is that it's based on the same 4K restoration as the Criterion release. For the most part, the 1.37:1 imagery is sensational, packed full of fine detail and reproducing the original three-strip Technicolor palette with aplomb. There is, however, some banding evident in the encode that holds the transfer back from perfection.

Audio: The film's LPCM dual-mono soundtrack has also been given a thorough restoration, bringing lustre, range and clarity to the quick-witted dialogue and Allan Gray's delightful score.

Extras: Here's the one area where the ITV disc really lags behind its Criterion counterpart. While that US release has plenty of goodies (including a chat-track, interviews and an episode of *The South Bank Show* about Michael Powell), all ITV can muster for its UK Blu-ray is a 10-minute short about Jack Cardiff, plus five text biographies. Very disappointing. **AvB**



HCC VERDICT

A Matter of Life and Death

→ ITV Studios → Region B BD
→ £25

WE SAY: A reasonable HD release – but one that falls short of the US Criterion Collection version.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH NEW DIGITALLY RESTORED BLU-RAY RELEASE
WRITTEN, PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY MICHAEL POWELL AND EMERIC PRESSBURGER
ITV STUDIOS GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT

Shampoo

The Criterion Collection → Region B BD
£28



Director Hal Ashby's 1975 romantic satire stars Warren Beatty as a Beverly Hills hairdresser who seems to spend

at least as much time bedding his female clientele as he does cutting their hair. Sourced from a 4K scan of the original 35mm negative, *Shampoo* comes to Blu-ray with an authentically grainy 1080p transfer and a choice of the original mono (LPCM) or remixed 5.1 (DTS-HD MA) soundtracks – although don't expect the latter to push your setup too hard. Slim extras consist of an appreciation of the film and a 1998 *South Bank Show* interview with Beatty. **MC**



The Producers: 50th Anniversary Edition

Studiocanal → Region B BD
£25



Comic filmmaker Mel Brooks is surprisingly poorly represented on Blu-ray in the UK, so the release of what many

consider to be his masterpiece on the format should be reason for celebration. Unfortunately, the fundamental strengths of the new 4K restoration that served as the basis for this disc's 1.85:1 Full HD encode are undermined by a distinct yellow push to the grading and an abundance of macroblocking. Bonus goodies include a new Q&A with Brooks, an hour-long *Making of...*, and an archival TV profile of actor Zero Mostel. **AvB**



The Comfort of Strangers

BFI → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£20



Adapted from a novel by Ian McEwan, Paul Schrader's 1990 drama is one of those films whose *raison d'être*

seems to be showing why you should never make friends with rich eccentrics when holidaying abroad – especially when (as is the case here) they're played by Christopher Walken. Beautifully shot by Dante Spinotti, this Venice-set film comes to Blu-ray with a solid 1.85:1 transfer, although the film's LPCM 2.0 soundtrack is extremely quiet. The BFI's disc also includes a very informative selection of bonus features. **AvB**



Eye of the Needle

BFI → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£20



This World War II thriller stars Donald Sutherland as a Nazi spy trying to get out of Britain with information vital to the

German war effort, only to embark on an affair with the married woman (Kate Nelligan) whose isolated Scottish island home he is stranded at during a storm. This effective and intriguingly ambiguous thriller makes a pretty good impression on Blu-ray with pleasing 1.85:1-framed 1080p imagery and clean LPCM 2.0 sonics (which also highlights some obvious ADR work). Welcome bonus features include a chat-track, an alternate ending and three wartime propaganda shorts. **AvB**





VPL-VW270ES / VPL-VW570ES /
VPL-VW870ES

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TV's *Legends...* continue to thrill

But the rest of DC's shared 'Arrowverse' don't fare quite so well in their latest seasons



→ THE DC TV UNIVERSE

DC's shared 'Arrowverse' of superhero TV shows returns to Blu-ray with four more boxsets.

Things don't get off to the best of starts with the sixth season of parent show *Arrow* falling back on the same tired old plot points. Just how many times do the writers think they can redo the whole 'Ollie doesn't trust his team and keeps secrets from them, causing the gang to fall apart' thing? At this point, a truly surprising season would see Team Arrow actually stick together for its entire run. A scattershot approach to the overriding story arc does the show no favours either.

Things improve slightly with the fourth season of *The Flash* which – following last season's misery-fest – receives a welcome injection of humour with the introduction of Hartley Sawyer's Ralph Dibney (aka Elongated Man). And while new 'big bad' The Thinker (Neil Sandilands) makes a welcome change from the evil speedsters that have plagued the show in the past, his storyline is stretched out to the point where it lacks any real momentum – ironic for a series about the world's fastest man.

Despite a fairly strong start, the third season of *Supergirl* also comes crashing down to earth with a bump. However, while there are glaring missteps along the way, it does manage to pace its main storyline quite well, and new villain Reign is actually pretty effective – even if she's not all that different from the previous season's main baddie.



Supergirl and Mon-El (bottom) continue to prove that you don't have to wear bike leathers to be a hero in the 'Arrowverse'

Thank heavens then for *Legends of Tomorrow*, which has now completely embraced the craziness of its time-travel setup and is just having an absolute blast. From an *E.T.* homage and Vikings worshipping a cuddly toy to the most bonkers final scrap you'll ever see, this third season is a weird and wacky treat.

It would be remiss not to also mention the superb four-episode crossover *Crisis on Earth X* (included in its entirety in each BD boxset). Pitting the various superheroes against Nazi versions of themselves from a parallel Earth, it's pure comic geek nirvana.

Picture: Once again Warner Bros. has presumably attempted to keep costs down by cramming an average of seven 40+ minute episodes onto the discs in each set. And once again the cost of doing this are instances of banding and compression artefacts that take the shine off the otherwise bold and textured AVC 1.78:1 Full HD encodes.

Audio: There may be room for improvement where the image quality is concerned, but we can't see anybody complaining about the dynamic, powerful and immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes that do such a terrific job of bringing the action scenes to life across these four Blu-ray boxsets.

Extras: All four boxsets include several character featurettes, as well as sharing the same 42-minute chat with the production team about the crossover and hour-long compilation of panel footage from the 2017 San Diego Comic Con. *The Flash*, *Supergirl* and *Legends of Tomorrow* add their own deleted scenes and gag reels. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Arrow: The Complete Sixth Season

→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD
→ £40

WE SAY: This season of *Arrow* misses the target as often as it hits.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT

The Flash: The Complete Fourth Season

→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD
→ £40

WE SAY: The world's fastest hero is in real need of pacier storytelling.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT

Supergirl: The Complete Third Season

→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD
→ £40

WE SAY: A so-so season backed up by a superpowered 5.1 soundtrack.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT

Legends of Tomorrow: The Complete Third Season

→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD
→ £40

WE SAY: Not quite legendary, but still the best of these Blu-ray boxsets.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

City of the Living Dead: Limited Edition

Arrow Video → Region B BD
£30



Arrow's second stab at Lucio Fulci's 1980 splatter flick improves significantly on its initial 2010 Blu-ray release.

Gone is the scanner noise and blocking that affected the old transfer, replaced by a much more film-like (and extremely grainy) 1.85:1 encode derived from a 4K restoration of the original 3-perf 35mm negatives. Restored audio is provided in mono, stereo and 5.1 DTS-HD MA English and mono DTS-HD MA Italian options. Copious extras include two commentaries, a host interviews and an appreciation of Fulci's Gothic films by Andy Nyman. **AvB**



Night of the Creeps: Limited Edition

Eureka Classics → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£18



Fred Dekker's hugely enjoyable B-movie homage finally lands on Blu-ray on this side of the Atlantic with a disc

that is guaranteed to delight fans of this cult classic. The well-rendered 1.85:1 image boasts good colour fidelity and excellent black levels, while the optional DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix (the original stereo track is also included) is pleasingly involving. Generous extras include two chat-tracks, a trivia subtitle track, an hour-long *Making of...* documentary, interviews with Dekker and actor Tom Atkins, seven deleted scenes and an alternate ending. **AvB**



Hereditary

Entertainment in Video → Region B BD
£25



Family grief and trauma lie at the heart of this disturbing, Polanski-esque horror film that won numerous plaudits

from critics when it hit cinemas this year. It doesn't quite live up to all the hype, but remains a striking and powerful film that lingers in the mind long after the end credits roll. This disc's intricately detailed 2.00:1 encode gets the best out of the film's highly stylised visuals, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack proves particularly atmospheric. In addition to eight deleted scenes, the Blu-ray also includes an unexpectedly in-depth behind-the-scenes featurette. **AvB**



The Strangers: Prey at Night

Universal Pictures/Vertigo Films
R2 DVD → £13



Director Johannes (47 Metres Down) Roberts brings some welcome 1970s style to this otherwise forgettable

sequel to the unfathomably popular 2008 home invasion horror. This time around the action is relocated to an abandoned trailer park, but otherwise it's very much business as usual. Denied a BD release in the UK, the film hits DVD with a sharp, colourful 2.40:1 anamorphic transfer, but the DD 5.1 mix is mainly focused on the front of the soundstage. Five two-minute EPK interviews are the only extras. **AvB**



This superb BD is no urban legend

All together now: Candyman, Candyman, Candyman, Candyman, Candyman...aarrghhhh!



→ CANDYMAN: LIMITED EDITION

Based on a short story by Clive Barker, this 1992 fright film stars Virginia Madsen as a grad student whose research into an urban legend about a hook-handed killer leads her into a world of horror.

As much as this might sound like the setup for a standard issue slasher, *Candyman* is a far smarter breed of film, subverting the usual genre tropes while using its story to explore issues around racial injustice. It's also brilliantly acted, beautifully photographed and, best of all, genuinely scary.

Picture: *Candyman* made its UK Blu-ray debut in 2011, courtesy of Universal Pictures, with a 1.85:1 VC-1 encode marred by black crush, posterisation, flat colours and a lack of fine textures.

Based on a 4K scan of the original 35mm camera negative, this new restoration improves on that

earlier encode in every way. Not only is it much more film-like, but the uptick in clarity and definition ensures there's far more detail on display. The colour palette is also more pronounced now, bringing a warmth back to flesh tones and a vibrancy to primaries.

The only exception to the above is the small amount of alternate footage seen in Chapter 9 of the 'UK Theatrical Version' (see below), which was sourced from a 35mm print and, as you would expect, looks far grainier and less well defined.

Audio: Arrow's release also trumps Universal's disc in the audio department, with the old LPCM stereo track now joined by a DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix that delivers some effective surround effects and packs some pretty potent LFE (you can actually feel Candyman's voice now, not just hear it). This 5.1 remix is not included on the alternate UK cut.

Extras: The first disc features the 'R-rated' US cut of the film, plus two chat-tracks (the first by director Bernard Rose and actor Tony Todd, the second by genre critics Stephen Jones and Kim Newman); new interviews with the two lead actors, the production designer and the makeup FX team; a discussion of Barker's original short story; a critical analysis of the film; and a trio of short films by Rose.

The second houses the 'UK Theatrical Version' of the film, which features an alternate (bloodier) version of the psychiatrist's office scene, plus a new half-hour interview with Clive Barker about both *Candyman* and his career in general.

Sadly, Arrow's Blu-ray misses out on the archival extras (including a Clive Barker commentary) that appeared on the 2008 UK DVD. **AvB**



Two *Candyman* sequels followed in 1995 and 1999 – neither came anywhere close to the brilliance of the original

HCC VERDICT

Candyman: Limited Edition

→ Arrow Video → Region B BD
→ £30

WE SAY: A stunning release for a modern genre masterpiece, despite the missing Barker chat track.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

'Dana Andrews said prunes gave him the runes, and passing them used lots of skill...'



DISC
OF THE
MONTH



A devilishly good release

Indicator summons up the definitive Blu-ray edition of Jacques Tourneur's classic horror

→ NIGHT OF THE DEMON: LIMITED EDITION

Psychologist John Holden (Dana Andrews) arrives in Britain to attend a conference on the paranormal, only to be confronted with news that a fellow speaker has died in a bizarre accident. The dead man's niece Joanna (Peggy Cummins) is convinced that her uncle was killed by Julian Karswell (Niall MacGinnis), an occultist he was investigating. Ever the sceptic, Holden refuses to believe the supernatural played any part in the man's death, but still ends up crossing paths with Karswell, who informs Holden he will die in three days.

Directed by Jacques Tourneur and adapted from M.R. James's story *Casting the Runes*, this 1957 film is a true classic of the genre – a genuinely spooky supernatural thriller that marries smart storytelling and atmospheric photography with superbly orchestrated scares and wonderful performances (not least MacGinnis's sinister Satanist). It's therefore bizarre that the film was treated so badly on its original release, being trimmed down and used as little more than double-bill filler on both sides of the Atlantic.

Perhaps it's all the puppet demon's fault for supposedly 'cheapening' what some people consider to be an otherwise astute piece of psychological horror (we still love him anyway). Whatever the truth of the matter, *Night of the Demon* is a stone-cold genre classic, and one that's finally received the treatment it deserves with this release...



Picture: Indicator's remarkably comprehensive double-disc release reflects the film's history by offering six viewing options: the original full-length version at 1.66:1 and 1.75:1; the US reissue (under the alternate title *Curse of the Demon*) at 1.66:1 and 1.75:1; the UK theatrical cut at 1.66:1; and the US theatrical cut at 1.66:1.

To achieve this, three different HD masters have been used – the two 1.75:1 encodes are based on a 2013 BFI restoration, while the 1.66:1 versions come from two remasters supplied by Sony. There are clarity and density differences across all three masters, with the theatrical 1.66:1 presentations looking the most organic, while the others appear a little softer. Regardless of the various strengths or weaknesses of the different masters, they look great in motion and shouldn't give any cause for concern.

Audio: Each presentation features a DTS-HD MA mono soundtrack. There's not much here to get particularly excited about from a technical point of view, but the audio has been cleaned up and it's hard to imagine how it could be bettered.

Extras: As if six different presentations of the film wasn't enough, this set is also loaded with extras. These include a commentary by Tony Earnshaw (author of the definitive book about the film's production); a retrospective *Making of...*; a handy visual essay about the different cuts of the film; eight lengthy 'appreciation' pieces focusing on aspects of the film and its source material; two archival interviews; a radio adaptation; the Super 8 version; and a superb 78-page booklet. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Night of the Demon: Limited Edition

→ Indicator → All-region BD
→ £25

WE SAY: A stunning Blu-ray release for a sensational piece of 1950s horror. Don't miss out!

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Michael Myers comes home... again

Classic chiller benefits from a 4K makeover, but audio purists will still be disappointed

→ HALLOWEEN: 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Long, languid takes, meticulous framing and an astonishing score do most of the heavy lifting in this wonderfully atmospheric 1978 horror making its Ultra HD Blu-ray debut. The story, co-written by director John Carpenter and producer Debra Hill, is basic, but this works in *Halloween's* favour, allowing Carpenter to focus on creating a mood rather than getting bogged down in complex plot mechanics.

Picture: Greater clarity abounds in this 4K platter compared to its Blu-ray counterpart. As Laurie and chums dawdle along Haddonfield's streets, hedgerows and trees bristle with extra detail, while household interiors are sharper, crisper and feel more solid. Facial close-ups particularly benefit from the resolution bump.

HDR (HDR10 was tested, but there's also Dolby Vision) is used to subtle effect. Light sources have greater luminance and believability, while night-time sequences are noticeably darker without losing image definition. Overall, the 4K version has a much better balance between light and dark; the pin-prick reflections in Donald Pleasance's eyes as he stands guard outside the Myers house are startling.

As for colour timing, this channels the cooler, desaturated aesthetic that made the previous 35th Anniversary Edition Blu-ray release from Anchor Bay (included here as the accompanying 1080p platter) a more naturalistic watch than *Halloween's* overly warm 2007 BD. It's not a uniform grade, however; in the opening scenes suburban lawns are a muted



green and Tommy's pumpkin a pallid orange, while colours seem to gain a little in punch in later sequences.

Audio: Sound choices are a lossy mono mix (which fans should note isn't the original theatrical version) or Dolby TrueHD 7.1. As ever, don't expect the latter soundtrack to make frequent use of the surround channels; most obviously it lends Carpenter's iconic score dynamic presence.

Extras: Lionsgate's 4K disc duplicates all the extras from the 1080p version, which is useful. These are an informative, chatty commentary from Carpenter and star Jamie Lee Curtis; the hour-long *Night She Came Home* documentary; a retrospective location featurette; footage from the TV version; the trailer; and TV and radio spots. However, an alternate commentary with Carpenter, Lee Curtis and Debra Hill, plus the 87-minute *Cut Above the Rest* doc from the 2007 BD, don't make an appearance. **MC**

4K
ULTRA
HD



Halloween cost just \$300,000 to make, but made \$47m at the US box office

HCC VERDICT

Halloween: 40th Anniversary Edition

→ Lionsgate → Ultra HD Blu-ray & Region B BD → £25

WE SAY: Not a definitive release, but this fab flick looks better than ever.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Popcorn

88 Films → All-region BD
£15



An all-night horror film festival is the setting for this amusing slasher that really comes into its own during the

wonderful film-within-a-film segments that perfectly capture the feel of the not-so-golden oldies they pastiche. Based on a 2K scan of the 35mm interpositive, *Popcorn* hits Blu-ray with a well saturated, cleanly delineated 1.78:1 Full HD encode. As well as the original stereo audio, the disc offers a somewhat superfluous 7.1 mix (both are presented as DTS-HD MA). A chat-track and fascinating hour-long documentary shed plenty of light on the film's production hiccups. **AvB**



Memoirs of an Invisible Man

Fabulous Films → Region B BD
£20



This 1992 would-be blockbuster packs in plenty of (at the time) state-of-the-art CG visual effects, but is undermined by the uncertain tone caused by star Chevy Chase wanting to play it as a straight drama and director John Carpenter attempting to make a comedy. Sadly, this UK release isn't a port of the recent restored US Blu-ray, instead using the same off-the-shelf HD master that was the source for the old German disc. Pick of the meagre extras is a four-minute featurette from 2003 looking back at the film's pioneering VFX. **AvB**



Troll: The Complete Collection – Limited Ed.

Eureka Classics → Region B BD
£20



Eureka's two-disc sets brings together the enjoyably goofy 1986 creature-feature *Troll* and 1990's related-in-name-only *Troll II*, a sequel often called one of the worst films ever made (it isn't, not least because it's just too weird to ever be boring). Both films are squeezed onto a single BD50 platter, with perfectly decent AVC 1.85:1 1080p encodes, plus some fun extras including a 50-min *Making of...* for *Troll* and a chat-track and Q&A (audio-only) for *Troll II*. The second BD houses the charming 2009 documentary *Best Worst Movie*, which catches up with *Troll II's* cast and explores the film's cult fandom. **AvB**



Making America great again?

Spin-off series purges the bloodshed, but still delivers some tense smallscreen thrills

→ THE PURGE: SEASON ONE

The Purge is a 10-episode 'television event' based on the indefatigable movie series of the same name. The brainchild of James DeMonaco, creator of the franchise, this episodic approach proves surprisingly effective, drawing us into the stories of a seemingly unrelated new cast of characters.

There's a Marine looking for his suicidal death cult sister, a high flying executive with revenge on her mind, and social climbers whose deal-making skills are more than a little suspect.

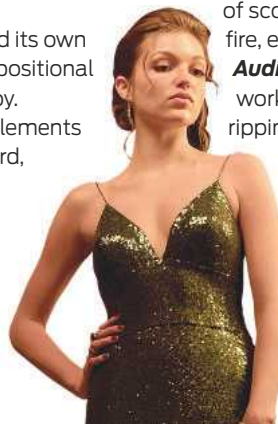
The basic *Purge* premise remains unchanged: once a year, for 12 terrifying hours, law and order takes the night off and all crime, even the most heinous of murders, is deemed legal. It's a night when crazies and psychos come out and party – and in this *Twilight Zone* America, that seems to constitute most of the population. The storytelling is tense, but the horror is surprisingly light on blood and gore.

While the franchise has established its own myths, there are structural and compositional cues here that *Purge* newbies will enjoy. You don't have to look too far to see elements of Walter Hill's *The Warriors* in the weird, gangs roaming the streets armed with heavy and outlandish weaponry. The street violence recalls John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13*, while the machete-wielding masked maniacs wandering around look like they're taking time out from a Michael Myers convention.



Picture: Production values appear high, but the show has a televisual rather than cinematic look. It's lensed sharp and composed for TV rather than bigscreen viewing. The action takes place largely at night and while this might seem to provide plenty of scope for HDR (headlights, piercing beams, fire, explosions), it's presented in SDR 1080p.

Audio: *The Purge* will give your AV system a workout, even when there's no overt action ripping up the screen. The 5.1 sound design makes particularly atmospheric use of music. Tyler Bates, who also scores Marvel's *The Punisher* for Netflix, and has been responsible for scoring both the *John Wick* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* movies, ramps up the tension with deep synth riffs and an ominous thumping bass. There's a definite John Carpenter vibe to his work here – and it's to die for. **SM**



The Purge film franchise is now up to its fourth instalment – prequel *The First Purge* was released this Summer

HCC VERDICT

The Purge: Season One

→ Amazon Prime Video

WE SAY: It may lack the cinematic flair of the movies, but this spin-off show still proves pretty addictive.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

→ BLOOD DRIVE: SEASON ONE

→ Sky Box Sets

This out-there show aired for one season on the Syfy channel in the US in 2017, and was then cancelled. With no subsequent home media release in the UK, it's nice that Sky has picked it up for a VOD debut.

Blood Drive boasts a unique setup – we're in the 'future' of 1999, with the US devastated by environmental disasters. Oil and water are scarce, and people compete for a \$10m prize in the Blood Drive, which is basically Death Race with added gore. In the first episode, cop Arthur and murderous racer Grace are thrown together, enter the Blood Drive and – hey presto! – we're on a trans-America road trip, with each episode exploring different tropes of the grindhouse genre, be it cannibals, vampires or B-movie kung-fu kicks.

If that all sounds odd, it's because it is. *Blood Drive* is nothing if not ambitious; a (seriously) blood-spattered, expletive-ridden homage to schlock

cinema, where bad taste reigns. It's not the sort of show you're likely to see being made by the BBC.

Aesthetically, the show suffers from being too glossy to really work as a 1970s cinema throwback, despite lens flare effects, desaturated colours and crash-zooms employed to ram home the grindhouse feel. When the edit suite tricks are dialled down, however, there's a solidity to the HD image (there's no UHD option).

High style can only take you so far – where *Blood Drive* maintains appeal is with its black humour (the local cop motto is 'We Kill Because We Care'), geek references (there's a place called Cronenburgh...) and fast-paced narrative. It's not entirely successful, though. The pastiches fall into rip-off territory on occasion, some of the supporting cast are weak, and the modern rock soundtrack grows tiring.

Maybe take it for a test drive... **MC**

★★★★★



Blood Drive offers 13 45-minute episodes filled with B-movie bedlam



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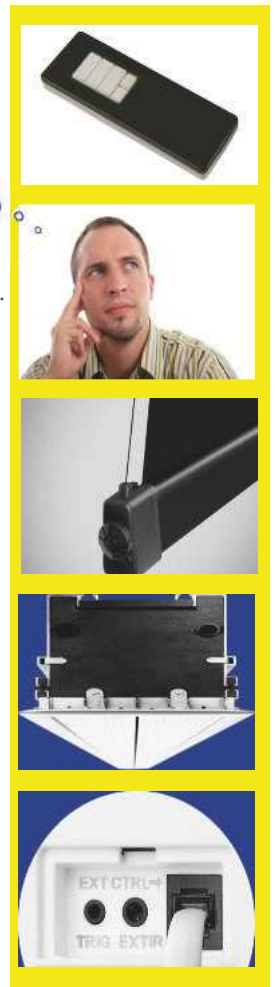
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Collecting...

A switch in time

Having revisited *12 Monkeys* on Blu-ray (see p96) and knowing the *Back to the Future* and *Terminator* films off by heart, **Team HCC** hunts for other time travel movies worth a spin...

ARMY OF DARKNESS

Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* series completes its transition into outright comedy in this 1992 fantasy, which finds the hapless Ash (Bruce Campbell) thrown back to the Middle Ages, where he must defeat an army of the dead in order to return to his own time. Slapstick gags, goofy rubber creature effects and Ray Harryhausen homages abound, while Bruce Campbell gets to completely cut loose. Hail to the king, baby!

Get it: From DVD to HD DVD and Blu-ray, *Army of Darkness* has been revisited countless times over the years (the US alone had seven different DVDs released). But for the definitive edition, you'll want to track down Shout Factory's Region A three-disc 'Collector's Edition' US Blu-ray, which includes four cuts of the film and a multitude of extras.



TIMECOP

One of Jean-Claude Van Damme's most memorable efforts (and a box office hit upon its release in 1994), *Timecop* has some strange visions of the future (2004) and a headscratching plot, but JCVD puts in a good shift, throwing kicks and punches with fan-pleasing frequency and even showcasing some subtler acting skills.

Get it: *Timecop* was dug up by Warner Bros in 2010 for a Blu-ray outing. The 1080p visuals impress more than the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, and there are no extras whatsoever, which is a shame.



ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES

This third instalment in the hit sci-fi series inverts the setup, with intelligent chimpanzees Cornelius and Zira escaping the destruction of their planet in Taylor's repaired spaceship, only to be flung back in time to 1973. But in true *Planet of the Apes* style, what begins as a fun fish-out-of-water story soon takes a much darker turn...

Get it: The Blu-ray is pretty much identical in every territory – but only the Region A-locked US BD includes the original mono mix.



TIME AFTER TIME

When it comes to time travel movies, you'd be hard pushed to find one with a better setup than Nicholas Meyer's cult favourite. This whimsical action-comedy sci-fi romp sees Jack the Ripper (David Warner) travelling through time to 1979 San Francisco, with author H.G. Wells (Malcolm McDowell) following hot on his heels determined to stop him.

Get it: As well as a restored 1080p encode and lively DTS-HD MA stereo sonics, the HMV-exclusive Premium Collection Blu-ray sports a terrific chat-track.



THE TIME MACHINE

A Victorian inventor builds a time machine and travels to a distant future where mankind has split into two species – the passive Eloi and the brutal, subterranean Morlocks who feed on them. As an adaptation of H.G. Wells' seminal novella, this 1960 film falls a little short of the mark, but judged on its own right it's an enjoyable sci-fi adventure – and still leagues ahead of the dire 2002 remake.

Get it: The existing Blu-ray is as good as it gets, but suffers from a dated HD master. Surely it's time for a new 4K restoration...



TIMECRIMES

If you're the sort of person who has trouble following *Back to the Future Part II*'s time travel antics, then this twisty 2007 Spanish thriller will absolutely blow your mind. Without giving the game away and spoiling your fun, the film follows the misadventures of a man who accidentally travels back an hour in time and then tries to put things right, only for everything to get a lot worse.

Get it: Thanks to its decent extras, the US R1 DVD is the best version for English speakers (the UK DVD is barebones). The film has been released on Blu-ray in Germany, but lacks English subtitles.



THE GIRL WHO LEAPT THROUGH TIME

A loose 2006 sequel to Yasutaka Tsutsui's 1967 novel of the same name, Mamoru Hosoda's beautifully melancholic high school romance anime sees a teenage girl discover that she can leap back through time. But she soon learns that using this gift to sort out her life has unintended consequences.

Get it: The UK Blu-ray looks and sounds good, but you'll need to import the Australian (Region B) or US (Region A) platter if you want any extra features.



THE PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT

There are some who believe the events depicted in this bonkers 1984 B-movie actually happened. Spoiler: they didn't – but that shouldn't detract from what's a well-oiled sci-fi adventure. Michael Pare is the US Navy sailor whisked from 1943 to the present day when the titular military experiment goes awry – can he save the day and get the girl?

Get it: *The Philadelphia Experiment* is missing on both US and UK Blu-ray – German and Japanese versions do exist, but are apparently poor quality. Maybe stick to the bargain-priced DVD.



BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

Californian high school buddies (Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter) use a time machine to help them with their history project in this 1989 cult comedy. ...*Excellent Adventure* is rough around the edges but oozes good-natured charm. Bring on part III...

Get it: Get Shout Factory's triple-disc Region A US release (which also features sequel flick ...*Bogus Journey*) for the biggest selection of extra features – although the UK 25th Anniversary BD from Studiocanal has some good bits and pieces.

DÉJÀ VU

When a New Orleans ferry is blown up, ATF agent Doug Carlin begins hunting for those responsible – enter Val Kilmer's FBI bod who thinks a new science toy that can see into the past might help solve the mystery. But watching the past is one thing. How about actually going back there?

Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and directed by Tony Scott, *Déjà Vu* (2006) bolsters its hokey science and time-travel gymnastics with expertly staged set-pieces and the director's unique visual flair.

Get it: A 2007 Blu-ray release from Disney and not revisited since – it'd be nice to see a 4K platter. Still, the BD is impressive, with a dynamic LPCM 5.1 soundtrack and sharp, contrasted 1080p visuals. The 'Surveillance Window' interactive viewing mode is fun, too.

TOP PICK



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HCC RATINGS KEY...	
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TOP 15 Televisions

01

**Samsung QE65Q9FN** → £3,000 ★★★★★

Revised QLED technology and the implementation of a local dimming backlight reap astonishing picture quality rewards with this bright, colourful 4K HDR hero. Great usability and smart platform, too. *HCC #285*

TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**Deadpool 2 [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

A larger budget and bolstered cast don't water down the basic 'X-rated X-man' premise of this fun sequel flick. Image quality is outshone by a chaotic, bass-rich Dolby Atmos mix. *HCC #291*

★★★★★

**A Quiet Place [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

The finely crafted Atmos track makes this disc home cinema demo fodder – the movie itself is a tense, post-apocalyptic horror with Emily Blunt in fine form in the lead role. *HCC #289*

★★★★★

**Ready Player One [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Steven Spielberg's most visually spectacular film since *War of the Worlds* benefits from a 4K HDR (Dolby Vision) encode and immersive Dolby Atmos soundmix. *HCC #290*

★★★★★

**Isle of Dogs**

Stop-motion animation from Wes Anderson with an excellent voice cast and wonderfully surreal story. The BD offers gorgeous 1080p visuals and an effective DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, but extras are sparse. *HCC #290*

★★★★★

**Avengers: Infinity War [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

While loaded with characters and narrative threads, this Marvel flick pulls it all off, and arrives on 4K BD (US import) with good – but not great – picture and sound. *HCC #290*

★★★★★

02



Philips 65OLED903 → £3,500 ★★★★★

Take impressive audio from a B&W-designed speaker array, OLED-delivered 4K HDR visuals that outshine the competition, and add a sprinkle of Ambilight, and you get the most exciting display Philips has ever released. *HCC #290*

03



Panasonic TX-65FZ852 → £3,000 ★★★★★

4K HDR OLED (with HDR10+ support) that offers subtlety and refinement in shades (particularly with colour presentation and near-black handling), making up for a slight lack of dynamic punch. Unobtrusive design, too. *HCC #290*

04



Samsung QE55Q9F

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Save a chunk of money by shopping for Samsung's flagship QLED TV at 55in size. Again, the 4K HDR performance here is superb, with efficient light control, excellent native brightness and rich, wide colour. *HCC #286*

05



LG OLED65E8

→ £4,300 ★★★★★

This Dolby Vision-enabled OLED boosts image quality on last year's E7 (it's brighter, for one thing), although its Atmos sonics are a tad less impressive. Tidy design and excellent UI. *HCC #287*

06



Philips 43PUS6753

→ £430 ★★★★★

Sharp, colour-rich, direct-LED images, plus Ambilight and Philips' bespoke SAPHI smart system, make this 43in 4K HDR LCD a smallscreen(ish) dream. Superb option for a second-room/budget setup. *HCC #291*

07



Sony KD-65AF8

→ £3,300 ★★★★★

Sony revises its OLED line with a new model offering a more conventional design than last year's A1. Acoustic Surface speaker technology and 4K visuals impress. Decodes Dolby Atmos bitstreams. *HCC #288*

08



Sony KD-55XF9005

→ £1,700 ★★★★★

Impressive backlighting, dynamic HDR images and top-quality motion processing are the major draws of this mid-tier Bravia. Android OS still needs improvement, though. *HCC #285*

09



Samsung QE65Q8DN

→ £2,900 ★★★★★

Not as bright as Samsung's top-of-the-range Q9 (and with fewer dimming zones) but still an impactful 4K HDR performer. Excellent HD upscaling, and native motion handling is also solid. *HCC #291*

10



Hisense H75U9A

→ £3,500 ★★★★★

This 75in LED is the brightest display we've seen, yielding benefits with HDR content, while backlit illumination aids black levels. Sharpness and colour delivery are less impressive, but the price/size ratio is good. *HCC #289*

11



Loewe Bild 3.55

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Loewe's entry-level 55in OLED TV offers an artful fusion of design and performance (with decent sonics). Not the best selection of integrated smarts, though, and some rivals are cheaper. *HCC #283*

12



Hisense 55U7A

→ £800 ★★★★★

FIFA-branded 4K HDR flatscreen that makes up for a lack of HDR brightness through its image clarity and solid black levels. Strong audio and a clutter-free smart platform sweeten the deal. *HCC #287*

13



TCL 55DC748

→ £700 ★★★★★

While this budget UHD LCD can look bright, detailed and colour-rich, its whole-frame dimming engine and absence of motion compensation count against it. The JBL soundbar is a little underpowered. *HCC #289*

14



Sony KD-55XF8505

→ £1,100 ★★★★★

This mid-tier edge-lit Sony set has its strengths, particularly its onboard audio and bright room/bright content playback. But a limited contrast means it never feels overly cinematic. *HCC #287*

15



Hitachi 75HL16T64U

→ £1,350 ★★★★★

This 75in megascreen offers a lot of 4K image for not a lot of money. Predictably, picture quality can't match that of big-brand rivals – but the TV holds appeal if you're mainly after an SDR display. *HCC #285*

TOP 15 Speaker systems

01



Bowers & Wilkins 700 Series 5.1

→£3,800 ★★★★★

This array finds the larger models in the 700 Series proving their mettle with formidable power and precision, an expressive mid-band and detailed highs. Excellent. HCC #285

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Photo courtesy of Gary J.Fernandez Limited



02

M&K Sound IW150 5.1 →£8,550 ★★★★★

The in-wall IW150 speakers offer the transparency and detail of a professional studio monitor in an enclosure that can vanish. This array adds driver-matched on-wall tripole surrounds and M&K's fearless X12 sub. The result is outstanding. *HCC #289*



03

Wharfedale DX-2 →£450 ★★★★★

The asking price of this 5.1 system will tell you it doesn't offer the last word in surround sound fidelity, but Wharfedale's package is compact, well made and faultlessly delivers on its home-cinema-on-a-budget promise. *HCC #283*



04

Monitor Audio Gold 300AV →£7,150 ★★★★★

This big-ticket package excels across the frequency range, offers exquisite design and packs setup flexibility via the dipole/monopole FX surrounds. *HCC #251*



05

KEF Q Series 5.1.2 →£3,300 ★★★★★

KEF's revamped Q Series now offers Atmos modules for an up-to-the-minute sonic experience. Big, bold-looking speakers. Robust, immersive audio. *HCC #280*



06

ATC HTS7 5.1 →£3,500 ★★★★★

Brit brand ATC rejigs the driver tech and neutral sound of its SCM range into a wall-mountable, flexible system perfect for discreet AV setups. *HCC #275*



07

NEW ENTRY

Elipson Prestige Facet 7.2.4 →£3,500 ★★★★★

13 cabinets come together to create a great-value and immersive Dolby Atmos array. Rich in fidelity and neutrality; modern styling is another plus point. *HCC #291*



08

Q Acoustics 3050i →£1,350 ★★★★★

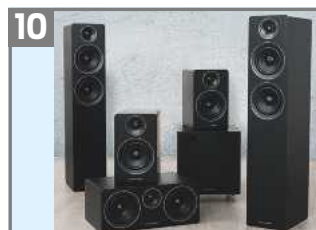
This update on the previous 3000 series makes subtle performance and styling improvements. The result is an excellent, well-priced, stylish package. *HCC #287*



09

Monitor Audio Silver 500 5.1 →£3,650 ★★★★★

The new Silver range offers a potent EQ-able sub, sweet design, dipole surrounds and largescale, nuanced sonics. Atmos upfiring models would be nice, though. *HCC #282*



10

Acoustic Energy 100 Series 5.1 →£1,300 ★★★★★

Acoustic Energy's latest addition scores well on style, ease of install and price, and puts in a consistently entertaining multichannel performance. *HCC #286*



11

Wharfedale Diamond 11 HCP →£800 ★★★★★

Bookshelf speakers and 10in sub combine in a system that offers mid-range and treble finesse and a healthy dollop of boisterous bass. Fun and affordable. *HCC #279*



12

Q Acoustics 7000i 5.1 Slim →£1,000 ★★★★★

Consistent tonality and detail retrieval are the standout elements here, joined by a cute, easy-to-accommodate design – particularly the 7060S sub. *HCC #284*



13

Jamo S Series 5.1.2 →£1,120 ★★★★★

An affordable package with drop-dead gorgeous styling, neat Atmos module integration and involving sonics – but the 8in sub isn't a beast. *HCC #290*



14

Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2 →£1,200 ★★★★★

Enjoyable-sounding and well-priced sub/sat system with Atmos upfiring in front L/R enclosures. Not the smallest 'satellite' speakers around. *HCC #276*



15

Polk Signature Series 5.1 →£1,450 ★★★★★

Largescale performance from a well-priced floorstanding system with slimmed-down centre enclosure. Upfront and boisterous sound; a great entertainer. *HCC #273*

TOP 10 Projectors



01 Sony VPL-VW760ES → £15,000 ★★★★★

This premium beamer adds laser illumination to Sony's 4K SXRD projection technology, and the results are staggering. It's not super-bright, but images are detailed, vivid and supremely well-balanced. Worthy of flagship status. HCC #283



02 JVC DLA-X5900 → £4,000 ★★★★★

An outstanding performer at this price point. JVC's latest D-ILA model may lack native 4K silicon but its eShift 4K engine shows real improvement and HDR playback has been greatly boosted too. A compelling home cinema PJ. HCC #282



03 Optoma UHD51 → £1,500 ★★★★★

This affordable 4K DLP model adds 3D playback (at 1080p) to its home cinema repertoire, making it an obvious upgrade for stereoscopy fans. Sharp, colour-rich and dynamic visuals. HCC #287



04 Sony VPL-VW360ES → £7,000 ★★★★★

In Sony's 4K range between the laser-based VW760ES and entry-level 260ES you'll find this accomplished beamer. Excellent imagery with both SDR and HDR. Motorised controls. HCC #284



05 Vivitek HK2288 → £2,500 ★★★★★

The Taiwanese brand returns to the UK with a 4K DLP PJ that balances impressive HDR brightness with stable images. Excellent remote control and decent zoom and throw options. HCC #285



06 BenQ TK800 → £1,200 ★★★★★

A lot of enjoyable performance crammed into a compact package. Offers 4K HDR playback, plus 3D, with only a limited black level and occasionally pushed colours counting against. HCC #288



07 Optoma UHZ65 → £5,000 ★★★★★

The asking price here reflects Optoma's addition of laser illumination (yielding improved contrast and far greater 'lamp' life) to the DLP 4K and HDR playback talents of its stablemates. HCC #282



08 Acer VL7860 → £3,500 ★★★★★

Laser 4K DLP projector that misses out on the contrast performance of some models, but undercuts them in terms of pricing. Use the Silent mode for whisper-quiet operation. HCC #284



09 Acer V6820i → £1,500 ★★★★★

Single-chip 4K DLP beamer with support for Alexa voice control (Alexa device required). While this doesn't prove particularly impressive, the PJ's dark-room image quality is decent and the styling superb. HCC #290



10 BenQ W1050 → £500 ★★★★★

There are a few cut corners on this budget DLP 1080p model (no backlight on the remote, no lens shift, a meagre zoom), but overall movie performance is good for the money. HCC #283

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TOP 10 Blu-rays

01



Oppo UDP-203 → £650 ★★★★★

Oppo debuted 4K with a superb universal design including Dolby Vision HDR. Packed with user adjustments and connectivity. No apps or Darbee processing, and the brand has now withdrawn from the BD market. HCC #269

02



Oppo UDP-205 → £1,400 ★★★★★

This pricey, peerless UHD deck flaunts universal disc playback, asynchronous USB input, headphone amp and balanced stereo outs amongst its audiophile features. One for musos, and you may struggle to find it for sale now. HCC #274

03



Sony UBP-X800 → £270 ★★★★★

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. HCC #274

04



Sony UBP-X700 → £250 ★★★★★

A compact player promised a DV update this Summer, the UBP-X700 has a nondescript design, no analogue outs and a stubby remote. But it plays great, and offers SACD support. HCC #284

05



Cambridge Audio CXUHD → £800 ★★★★★

The lack of analogue outputs is a surprise considering CA's heritage, but this universal (and DV-capable) deck sounds sweet over its digital outs. As with Oppo's UDP-203, a MediaTek SoC is used. HCC #279

06



NEW ENTRY

Panasonic DP-UB420 → £250 ★★★★★

Hi-res file support and HDR10+ compatibility make up for this deck's lightweight build and basic streaming app provision (no 4K support at the time of our review). Plenty of user tweaks. HCC #291

07



Panasonic DMP-UB700 → £300 ★★★★★

Shorn of some of the audiophile niceties of the UB900 (including multichannel analogue outputs), but still a safe pair of hands with your 4K BDs. And at a bargain price. HCC #270

08



Panasonic DMP-UB300 → £130 ★★★★★

Great 4K imagery from this bargain deck, but you might prefer to up your budget for the UB700 – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. HCC #272

09



Samsung UBD-K8500 → £180 ★★★★★

Debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player that finds fans courtesy of its sensible price point (now even lower), connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. HCC #260

10



Samsung UBD-M9500 → £230 ★★★★★

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. HCC #275

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Photo courtesy of Gary J. Fernandez Limited

TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors



01 Denon AVR-X6400H →£2,100 ★★★★★

This receiver's 11 channels of power are joined by Atmos, DTS:X and integrated Auro-3D, plus HEOS multiroom integration, making it peerlessly flexible. Sound delivery is quick-footed and articulate. A superb one-box solution. *HCC #280*



02 Arcam AVR850 →£4,500 ★★★★★

High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ for an excellent performance. Lacks a few feature frills, but 11-channel pre-outs allow full-fat setups. *HCC #257*



03 Denon AVC-X8500H →£3,300 ★★★★★

For those who want to go even bigger with their Atmos/DTS:X system, this flagship provides 13 channels of power. Setup can be complex, and there's no FM tuner, but otherwise this is first-class. *HCC #285*



04 Trinnov Altitude16 →£13,000 ★★★★★

High-end 16-channel processor dazzles with its Optimizer room/speaker calibration tech. Balanced outputs for compatible amplifiers. Reference-grade sound quality. *HCC #287*



05 Marantz NR1608 →£600 ★★★★★

With a smoother sound signature than before and the addition of HEOS multiroom, Marantz's 7.1-channel slim-line AVR flies the flag for living-room friendly AV. Only one HDMI out, though. *HCC #278*



06 Marantz AV8805 →£3,600 ★★★★★

The most affordable 13-channel processor around, the AV8805 combines lean looks, setup flexibility and a musical, detailed sound performance. Uses Audyssey MultEQ XT32 calibration. *HCC #288*



07 Sony STR-DN1080 →£550 ★★★★★

Sony is back in the AVR game with a first Atmos model that adds worthy phantom rear speaker processing to its 5.1.2 sonics. A few UI niggles don't take much of the shine off an impressive budget buy. *HCC #277*



08 NAD T 777 V3 →£2,500 ★★★★★

Dirac-enabled seven-channel AV receiver (with 11-channel processing). Powerful, even-handed sonics and wonderfully easy to use, but a firmware update is still awaited for DTS:X decoding. *HCC #285*



09 Yamaha RX-A3070 →£1,600 ★★★★★

Currently Yamaha's most potent receiver, this nine-channel model is packed with features and performs solidly, but a GUI/remote control upgrade would be welcome. *HCC #286*



10 Denon HEOS AVR →£800 ★★★★★

Able to run wireless rears/sub (using HEOS models) and sporting a display-free design, this is a five-channel AVR with a different approach. One for HEOS devotees only. *HCC #276*

TOP 5 Bonus features



Xploring Xtro

Possibly the best thing about Second Sight's Blu-ray for the bonkers, low-budget, cult UK sci-fi *Xtro* is this hilarious and candid hour-long *Making of...* doc. Essential post-movie viewing. *HCC #288*

★★★★★



Verhoeven Versus Verhoeven

A detailed documentary from 2016 celebrating the filmmaker's lengthy and controversial career – you'll find it on Eureka's recent *Flesh + Blood* Blu-ray release. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



Ghost Stories: Directors' commentary

Directing/writing duo Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson provide a superb chat track for their spooky anthology flick, highlighting the movie's countless Easter Eggs. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



Deadpool 2 commentary

Star Ryan Reynolds, director David Leitch and writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick team up for this detail-packed but also light-hearted chat track for the recent superhero sequel Blu-ray release. *HCC #291*

★★★★★



All Eyes on Lenzi: The Life and Times of the Exploitation Titan

Wonderful 84-minute documentary focusing on Italian director Umberto Lenzi, included on 88 Films' new BD release of 1975 flick *Eyeball*. *HCC #291*

★★★★★

TOP 10 Subwoofers



01 SVS SB-2000 → £800 ★★★★★

This follow up to the SB-1000 offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbues Blu-rays with quick, taut and potent LFE, it's a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. HCC #233



02 REL No.25 → £6,500 ★★★★★

REL celebrates its 25th anniversary in style with this 15in/1,000W premium concoction that exhibits exhilarating speed and nuance down to serious depths. Big, but beautiful. HCC #271



03 Bowers & Wilkins DB1D

→ £3,750 ★★★★★

This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. HCC #277



04 JL Audio Fathom f212v2

→ £6,500 ★★★★★

A second outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (3,600W) and room EQ improvements among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. HCC #261



05 SVS SB16-Ultra

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. HCC #270



06 REL HT/1205

→ £700 ★★★★★

A larger (12in) driver and punchier amp than on the HT/1003 increases LFE enjoyment – but still at a bargain price. Lacks a bit of subtlety though. HCC #290



07 REL HT/1003

→ £500 ★★★★★

REL targets film fans with a 10in sub that drops its usual simultaneous high/low-level input to hit a new price point. Power and speed are its strengths. HCC #286



08 SVS SB-4000

→ £1,800 ★★★★★

Similar in operation and styling to the SB16-Ultra flagship, but smaller and more affordable. Superior DSP results in a real sense of control. HCC #284



09 GoldenEar SuperSub X

→ £1,450 ★★★★★

Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. HCC #272



10 KEF Kube10b

→ £600 ★★★★★

The middle option of KEF's new Kube range packs a 10in driver, 300W Class D amp and 56-bit DSP engine to maintain efficient low-frequency control. HCC #283

TOP 5 Console games



God of War

An HDR showcase for both PS4 and PS4 Pro (and playable in upscaled 4K on the latter), this action/puzzler is massive in scope and, in the Leviathan Axe, features perhaps the best weapon in gaming! HCC #286

★★★★★



F1 2018

HDR grading adds visual allure to Codemasters' latest racing sim, while various tweaks to the career mode loosen the straitjacket approach of previous years and make it easier for novices. Hooray! HCC #290

★★★★★



Marvel's Spider-Man

Swing around New York City in this joyous, bright and colourful superhero tie-in. Graphically rich, with intuitive gameplay and fast, free-flowing combat. A suitably epic score completes an excellent all-round package. HCC #291

★★★★★



Jurassic World: Evolution

Wanna run your own dinosaur-filled theme park? This addictive and time-stealing movie tie-in lets you do just that. Challenging final levels make up for a lack of variety. Excellent 4K visuals on next-gen consoles. HCC #288

★★★★★



Far Cry 5

A cautious update on its predecessor, but there's still plenty of fun gameplay to be had in this open-world first-person shooter. Plays in native 4K HDR on Xbox One X, and better-than-HD on PS4 Pro. HCC #285

★★★★★

TOP 10 Accessories



01 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★

KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice to beef up a system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. First-rate build. *HCC #252*



02 Yamaha WX-AD10 → £150 ★★★★★

Simple to use, unobtrusive add-on that brings MusicCast multiroom/hi-res streaming to legacy AV gear via 3.5mm/phono. Not a bad price – only available in grey, unfortunately. *HCC #274*



03 Nvidia Shield Android TV → £180 ★★★★★

The Android-based streamer/gaming box gets a gentle revamp – same silicon, neater design, new features including future support for Google Assistant. Slick and easy to use. *HCC #272*



04 Roku Streaming Stick+ → £70 ★★★★★

If a simple life is your aim, this content-rich, 4K/HDR-capable dongle from the streaming specialist is your friend. Idiot-proof interface and control. Good price. *HCC #282*



05 Amazon Fire TV (2017) → £70 ★★★★★

HDR playback has been added to Amazon's great-value media streamer, although the absence of an Ethernet port does niggle considering its 4K talents. Cluttered UI. *HCC #280*



06 Panasonic SC-GA10 → £230 ★★★★★

Panasonic partners with Google Assistant for its debut smart speaker, and doesn't forget to focus on sonic power as well as AI fun. Pricier than many rivals, but still appealing. *HCC #284*



07 Edifier S350DB → £250 ★★★★★

Active 2.1 speaker system that's a fine alternative to a soundbar, with good bass integration and effects separation. No HDMI hookup and retro styling, but easy to setup and use. *HCC #291*



08 Apple TV 4K → £180 (32GB) ★★★★★

With Apple's iTunes movie store offering 4K HDR (Dolby Vision) movies at the same price as Full HD downloads, this compact media player (irritating handset aside) is sure to tempt. *HCC #284*



09 PSB Imagine XA → £350 ★★★★★

These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*



10 Systemline S7 Netlink Music Player → £700 ★★★★★

Stereo streamer with integrated services including BBC Radio at better-than-usual quality. Installation flexibility makes up for the prosaic design. *HCC #290*

TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



Predator: 3-Movie Collection [Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Two great movies and one average one reborn in 4K, with existing extras and audio mixes ported from previous BDs. *Predator* now benefits from a DNR-free approach. *HCC #290*

★★★★★



The Expanse: Season One

Some bonus bits would be welcome on this 10-episode Blu-ray boxset, but *The Expanse* remains one of the best sci-fi series around, and the HD visuals and lossless 5.1 mixes impress too. *HCC #291*

★★★★★



Mission: Impossible 1-5 [Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Tom Cruise risks life and limb over two decades of stunt-filled fun. Image quality varies across the five Dolby Vision/HDR10 encodes, with 2011's *Ghost Protocol* faring best. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



The Complete Sartana

Five over-the-top Spaghetti Western flicks from the 1960s/'70s may find a new audience via this solid Blu-ray boxset from Arrow Video. Three audio commentaries are among the extras. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



Samuel Fuller at Columbia, 1937-1961

A second Columbia Pictures set from Indicator, packing seven flicks from the crime reporter-turned filmmaker. Impressive picture quality and decent extras. *HCC #288*

★★★★★

TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



01 Samsung HW-N950 → £1,500 ★★★★★

The latest and greatest soundbar system to arrive from Samsung's US-based Audio Lab, the HDMI-equipped N950 crafts a dynamic, detailed and immersive 7.1.4 Atmos/DTS:X soundfield without cluttering your room. HCC #290



02 Canton DM55 → £240 ★★★★★

Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. HCC #260



03 Yamaha YSP-5600SW → £1,900 ★★★★★

With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. HCC #254



04 Denon HEOS Bar → £570 ★★★★★

Multiroom-ready and app-controllable, this premium single-enclosure model offers powerful, detailed and warm sonics in spades. Can be expanded into a 5.1 system with extra HEOS hardware. HCC #287



05 Q Acoustics M3 → £300 ★★★★★

A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. HCC #271



06 LG SK10Y → £1,200 ★★★★★

High-price but high-performance, LG's Atmos-enabled soundbar system is large in scale, rich in bass and offers 4K HDMI switching. Over 1.4m wide, so won't suit all setups. HCC #288



07 Sony HT-ZF9 → £650 ★★★★★

This 3.1-channel soundbar handles Dolby Atmos streams and promises enveloping sonics via DSP trickery. The result isn't noticeable overhead audio, but a wide, high and exciting performance. HCC #289



08 JBL Bar Studio → £150 ★★★★★

No subwoofer here, just a fairly compact stereo 'bar that offers a useful soundstage-widening 'Surround' mode, HDMI ARC connectivity, and a decent performance for the price. HCC #284



09 Q Acoustics M2 → £300 ★★★★★

Easily accommodated in/on AV furniture, and packing HDMI ARC for a simple hookup, this BMR-driver/built-in woofer soundbase impresses with its energetic delivery and price. HCC #279



10 Panasonic SC-HTB258 → £150 ★★★★★

When space is tight, this oh-so compact 'bar (plus slim sub) will do the job. Bass is well-defined and dialogue strong, but the soundstage is narrow. Connections are HDMI ARC, Bluetooth and optical. HCC #279

TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



Black Book

Paul Verhoeven's Dutch language WW2 thriller is outed by 101 Films on its new 'Black Label' imprint. Image quality is improved over previous releases, and the film is joined by exclusive new extras. HCC #290

★★★★★



Saving Private Ryan: Commemorative 20th Anniversary [UHD Blu-ray]

Excellent use of HDR, an uptick in detail and a new Dolby Atmos mix make this WW2 drama hard to ignore on 4K BD. No new extras, though. HCC #288

★★★★★



The Changeling: Limited Ed.

Peter Medak's 1980 ghost story has acquired a cult following, meaning this belated UK BD will be welcomed. Restored visuals, DTS-HD MA audio and extras including a 40-page booklet boost its appeal. HCC #290

★★★★★



The Deer Hunter [UHD Blu-ray]

Michael Cimino's slow-burning Vietnam War drama hits 4K with a pleasing HDR10/Dolby Vision grade. This lux set includes the CD soundtrack, booklet, script and plenty of extras. HCC #291

★★★★★



Sex, Lies and Videotape

Steven Soderbergh's award-winning 1989 drama gets lush treatment from Criterion Collection, including rock-solid visuals courtesy of a 4K scan from the original 35mm negative. HCC #290

★★★★★

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TOP 5 PVRs



Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★



Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



Humax FVP-5000T

Revamped menus, faster operation and tweaks to its triple-tuner engine make this the most advanced Freeview Play PVR around – and it doubles admirably as a DLNA player/media jukebox. 500GB/1TB/2TB

★★★★★



Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



NEW ENTRY

Manhattan T2-R, £120

The 500GB HDD and twin-tuner spec of this Freeview HD PVR is basic, but Manhattan's new hardware design, user interface (and the price tag) are appealing. Easy to use.

★★★★★

TOP 5 Headphones



Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★



Nuraphones, £350

Unusual over-ear/in-ear hybrid cans that measure the acoustic response of your inner ear to fine-tune performance. It's a highly impressive trick, but the design can make these a bit uncomfortable to wear.

★★★★★



1More MK802, £150

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★



Bowers & Wilkins PX, £330

B&W adds noise-cancelling to the general spec of its previous P7 wireless cans, a welcome update for those seeking uninterrupted listening. Offers a neutral, balanced sound suited to both movies and music

★★★★★



Audio Technica ATH-SR9, £400

45mm drivers and Audio Technica's Midpoint Mount tech deliver wide, deep, spacious sonics. Memory foam padding aids listener comfort; 3m cable should suit most AV setups

★★★★★

TOP 5 Wireless speakers



KEF Muo, £300

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★



Sony SRS-X11, £60

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★



Dynaudio Music 7, £875

Top-of-the-range multiroom option from Dynaudio, this sizable speaker creates a full-range, detailed soundstage. Music App offers useful adjustments and EQ modes. Inputs include HDMI (ARC)

★★★★★



AirPulse Audio A200, £800

Monitor-style active speakers offering physical and wireless hookups, a premium build and a sweet yet weighty sound delivered by ribbon tweeters and 5.1in midbass drivers

★★★★★



Denon HEOS 5 HS2, £350

The mid-range multiroom speaker gets a second-gen revamp, adding welcome hi-res audio playback and Bluetooth connectivity. Gorgeous looks, boisterous, room-filling sound

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA

Choice

→ IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Ultra HD invasion We cast our eyes over the surge of back-catalogue titles hitting 4K BD
Remaster class Talking restoration with Disney's in-house expert Theo Gluck
Feel your presents AV treats this Christmas

→ REVIEWS

NAD M17 v2 Dirac processor **Panasonic DP-UB820** 4K BD player **Klipsch Atmos system** **IOTA AVXP1** power amp **Sony VPL-VW270ES projector**
PLUS News, software, opinion, comps and more

ISSUE
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Nov 29

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



AV Avenger

Move over Dolby Atmos? **Steve May** thinks he may have seen and heard the future of home cinema – and it's called IMAX Enhanced

IMAX ENHANCED HAS taken my breath away. I don't mind admitting I was cynical, thinking it to be little more than a marketing wheeze (which it undoubtedly is). But after attending the first ever demo of the new standard outside the US, I left a convert, desperate for more.

IMAX Enhanced is a collaboration between DTS and IMAX. It's both a licensing and certification program, covering high-end TVs, AV receivers and processors, and introducing a proprietary software encoding and mastering system.

To obtain an IMAX Enhanced badge, hardware needs to meet a lofty performance benchmark set by a committee of IMAX and DTS engineers. This is clearly an echo of the THX certification program. Mastering uses bespoke post-production software, with audio delivered via the DTS:X platform, making it a clear competitor to Dolby Atmos.

Demo heaven

I had my IMAX conversion courtesy of CI distributor AWE, which secured not only the first sample of IMAX Enhanced hardware for its annual trade-only expo, but also one of only two (actual) Blu-ray discs in the world that contain 4K IMAX mastered content.

Obviously, what you get out of IMAX Enhanced is proportional to what you put in, and the AWE team pulled out all the stops for the reveal. The IMAX Enhanced component in play was the Marantz AV8805, a 13-channel processor, partnered with Marantz and Classe amplification, and disgorged via KEF Reference loudspeakers and DefTech SuperCube 8000 subwoofers in a 7.6.6 config. The total cost of this kit and kaboodle was £50,000 – not outrageous in the world of high-end home theatre.

One takeaway is that you don't need a fully-branded IMAX Enhanced hardware setup; just as well

as there simply isn't much gear available. But a processor like the Marantz seems a good start point.

The demo disc was so fresh it didn't even have a working menu structure, but the clips looked and sounded sensational. IMAX is currently a little cagey about what exactly is happening at the encode stage, but using the existing framework of 4K UHD, the AV bar has been blasted into orbit.

We're told movies shot with IMAX cameras, and shown theatrically in a full IMAX aspect ratio, will be released full-frame on IMAX 4K discs. Film fans frustrated that some of their favourite movies, shot on IMAX but coming to Blu-ray cropped, will breathe a sigh of relief that IMAX Corp itself is keen for original ratio movies to make it into the home.

Secondly, the selection of clips seems to confirm that IMAX has indeed found a way to make better-looking UHD platters. **These early sample images, projected 133in across, looked astoundingly clean and detailed.**

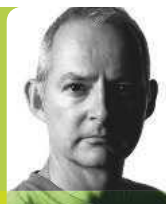
And the audio is indeed magnificent. One standout sequence, from the IMAX NASA Space Shuttle documentary *The Dream is Alive*, delivered breath-taking dynamics and spine-tingling steerage. I've not actually been to a Space Shuttle launch, but I'm convinced this must be what they sound like.

Thankfully IMAX Enhanced discs are completely compatible with existing home cinema hardware. For the demo, a Panasonic DP-UB9000 deck was used.

It remains to be seen if the standard gets any traction with mainstream studios, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed, not least because Dolby Atmos is no longer any guarantee of sonic excitement. Serious home cinephiles deserve a new champion for cinematic audio. IMAX Enhanced could be it ■

*Do you look for THX certification on hardware?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Having enjoyed the AWE demo, **Steve May** wants to add another four subwoofers to his cinema room – but it would mean losing all the seats





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